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David Bostock

The Theme of Faith in the Hezekiah Narratives

This study examines the Hezekiah narratives as found in 2 Kgs 18-20 and Isa. 36-39, with special reference to the theme of faith, using narrative criticism as its methodology. Attention is paid especially to setting, plot, point of view and characterization within the narratives. The Kings version is taken as the main text for exegesis purposes, but relevant differences in the Isaiah text are noted. Articles and books on “faith” in the Old Testament rarely mention Hezekiah as an example of faith. Until recently, studies that have treated the theme of faith in the book of Isaiah have tended to neglect this section because of their historical-critical stance. Again, there are many studies of the Hezekiah narratives, but few focus on literary methods and/or the theme of faith. The major part of the study involves an exegesis of the text. How the narratives function within the context of the book of Kings is also considered. Furthermore, faith as a theme in the book of Isaiah is examined, and comparison is made especially between Isa. 36 and Isa. 7. The plot of the longest narrative (2 Kgs 18:13-19:37/Isa. 36-37) proves to be very instructive in the way that the verb **בָּטַח** (to trust) is used. Isaiah, YHWH, Sennacherib and Hezekiah emerge as main characters within the narratives. Different points of view and the use of temporal and geographical setting also reinforce the characterization. In particular, a largely positive portrait of Hezekiah as an example of faith emerges.

The Theme of Faith in the Hezekiah Narratives

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PhD

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Theology

2003

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Introduction

In this introduction, the literature pertaining to the theme of faith and the Hezekiah narratives will be briefly surveyed, and the approach to the text briefly outlined.

The translations of the Hebrew text are taken from the RSV, unless otherwise stated.

Literature Survey

The literature that is reviewed below relates mainly to the twentieth century. It is doubtful whether much would be gained by extending the survey to works of the early modern period. The historical-critical approach, which was developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, became the dominant method in many of the studies of the last century. The results of the earlier works are generally repeated and built upon in later studies. In the latter half of the twentieth century, however, a sea change occurred in the study of the text, which is very significant for the present study. The text began to be examined in the form in which it has been received. In the following survey, articles, essays and monographs that centre on the theme of faith will be considered first. Then works that focus on the Hezekiah narratives will be surveyed. Finally, works of Old Testament theology will be perused for any contribution that they may make.

There are several articles and longer works on "faith" in the Bible or the Old Testament. Many of the articles in the standard Bible and theological dictionaries make little or no mention of Hezekiah.¹ Similarly, Fohrer in an

¹ For example, Joseph P. Healey, "Faith-Old Testament", *ABD*, II, pp. 744-749. E.C. Blackman, "Faith", *IDB*, II, pp. 222-234, especially pp. 222-223, 225-227. J.M. Ward, "Faith, Faithfulness in the Old Testament", *IDBSup*, pp. 329-332. O. Michel, "πιστις", *NIDNTT*, I, pp. 593-606; Dieter Lührmann "Glaube", *RAC*, cols. 48-122, especially cols. 55-63. Artur Weiser, "Faith – The Old Testament Concept", *TDNT*, VI, pp. 182-196. Otto Kaiser, *RGK* (4th edn), cols. 944-947. Klaus Haacker, "Glaube", *TRE*, XIII, pp. 277-304, especially pp. 277-289. J.B. Bauer and H. Zimmermann, "Faith," *EBT*, I, 237-43.

article on “Basic Structures of biblical Faith” does not include Hezekiah among his examples of faith, which he understands to depend on personal correlation between God and man.² As the verbal forms of the Hebrew root אָמַן are not found in the Hezekiah narratives (only the noun אֱמֶן), it is not surprising that articles on אָמַן have little to say about Hezekiah, but Jepsen notes that only David and Hezekiah have reliability before God attributed to them.³ The articles on אָמַן by R.W.L. Moberly in *NIDOTTE* and E. Gerstenberger in *TLOT* highlight the use of the term in 2 Kgs 18-19.⁴ There is also a specific article on “Hezekiah” by Iain W. Provan in the former work; he discusses the portrayal of Hezekiah’s character and mentions his trust in YHWH.⁵

One article should receive special mention, as it is of particular relevance. While this study was in progress, John W. Olley published “‘Trust in the Lord’: Hezekiah, Kings and Isaiah.”⁶ This is a significant survey of the verb אָמַן, beginning with the context of the Hezekiah narratives. Olley notes the unusual concentration of the אָמַן root in 2 Kgs: 18-19 and Isa. 36-37 and continues with a survey of the references in these chapters. Olley then surveys the use of אָמַן in the books of Isaiah, Psalms, Proverbs, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve. His findings will be considered in the body of the study.

² Georg Fohrer, “Basic Structures of Biblical Faith” in *Studien Zum Alten Testament* (BZAW, 196; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), pp. 101-131.

³ A. Jepsen, “אָמַן”, *TDOT*, I, pp. 292-323 (315-316); R.W.L. Moberly, “אָמַן”, *NIDOTTE*, I, pp. 427-433; Hans Wildberger, “אָמַן”, *TLOT*, I, pp. 134-157;

⁴ R.W.L. Moberly, “אָמַן”, *NIDOTTE*, I, pp. 644-649 (646-648). E. Gerstenberger, “אָמַן”, *TLOT*, I, pp. 226-230 (227). A. Jepsen (“אָמַן”, *TDOT*, II, pp. 88-94) also makes passing reference to Hezekiah.

⁵ Iain W. Provan, “Hezekiah”, *NIDOTTE*, IV, pp. 703-707.

⁶ John W. Olley, “‘Trust in the Lord’: Hezekiah, Kings and Isaiah”, *TB* 50 (1999), pp. 59-77.

Despite its title, Robert Davidson's book, *The Courage to Doubt*, has a good deal to say about faith.⁷ In his chapter on "Jerusalem – Symbol or Snare?" he suggests that the deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian threat (2 Kgs 18:17-19:37) seemed to vindicate the doctrine of the inviolability of Jerusalem,⁸ but he does not explicate any other issues in connection with the Hezekiah narratives. In a monograph entitled *Faith*, H-J Hermisson concentrates on the stories connected with Abraham and the Exodus, on laments in the Psalms, and on first and second Isaiah, but only mentions Hezekiah in passing.⁹ Buber makes no reference to Hezekiah in his well-known work, *Two Types of Faith*.¹⁰ In a short monograph containing three lectures about "faith" in the Old Testament, Wenham quotes Isa. 36:4-8 as an example of trusting in God for deliverance in a time of crisis, but again there is little explication of the passage.¹¹ Thus, books and articles on faith in the wider context of the Old Testament tend to pay little attention to the Hezekiah narratives.

At least three studies have concentrated on faith in connection with the book of Isaiah. Blank in his *Prophetic Faith in Isaiah* discusses Isa. 36-39 mainly in relation to Isa. 7.¹² He argues that the stories contain legendary material, and he is keen to distinguish this "Isaiah of legend" from Isaiah of Jerusalem. He notes the similarities between the stories in Isa. 36-39 and the miracle tales of earlier prophets such as Elijah and Elisha. The accuracy of the prophet's predictions in Isa. 36-39 is also highlighted. Yet, these points are noted in order to demonstrate the difference between the two "Isaiahs" in Blank's view. He does not use the narratives to infer what they

⁷ Robert Davidson, *The Courage to Doubt: Exploring an Old Testament Theme* (London: SCM Press, 1983).

⁸ Davidson, *Courage*, pp. 145-146.

⁹ Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, and Eduard Lohse, *Faith* (Biblical Encounter Series; Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), p. 81. The Old Testament section was written by Hermisson.

¹⁰ Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

¹¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Faith* (Leicester: Theological Students' Fellowship, 1976), p. 10.

¹² Sheldon H. Blank, *Prophetic Faith in Isaiah* (London: A & C Black, 1958), pp. 11-14.

might teach about faith. Even when discussing the root אֱמוּנָה, Blank does not mention Isa. 36-37 where it is found several times.¹³

Secondly, there is a recent PhD which focuses on the theme of faith as found in the writings of Isaiah of Jerusalem, but not in the book of Isaiah as it has been received. The author, Wong, proceeds on historical-critical lines and, thus, does not include the whole of first Isaiah (chs. 1-39) in his considerations, but only those passages that he believes to be “authentic” Isaiah of Jerusalem.¹⁴

He asserts that “If the message of the final form of the Book is to be equated (at least in part) with the intentions of the final editor, then one must first attempt to ascertain what sources were used by this editor in the final composition of the Book.”¹⁵ It may be worthwhile to try to find such sources, but there is no “must” about it. A synchronic reading of the text as it has been received, without necessarily knowing the origins of the sources of the text, is a perfectly legitimate pursuit. The message that is thereby deduced may be seen as equivalent to the intentions of the final editor, but even this is not necessarily so. This difference of emphasis, where meaning is sought in the text itself rather than in the original author(s)/editor(s), may well lead to a different understanding of the concept of faith in the book of

¹³ Blank, *Faith*, pp. 40-48.

¹⁴ The word “authentic” is used by many scholars to indicate their belief that particular words were the *ipsissima verba* of a named prophet. The question should be raised as to what conclusions might be drawn from the use of a tendentious term such as this. The danger is that other words or pericopes of a canonical book may be regarded as secondary material, and thus, less important or relevant. The aim of studying the prophet behind the book is not objectionable in itself, “...but it obviously must not be confused, as it so often has been, with a proper study of the books as artefacts in their own right...” (H.G.M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah* [The Didsbury Lectures 1997; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998], p. 94.)

¹⁵ Gordon C.I. Wong, *The Nature of Faith in Isaiah* (unpublished PhD thesis; Cambridge, 1995), p. 1, n. 2. It is interesting to note that in a more recent article, Wong (“Faith in the Present Form of Isaiah VII 1-17”, *VT* 51 [2001], pp. 535-547 [535]) states, “My purpose...will be to comment on the main proposals made concerning the nature of Isaianic faith, evaluated not in relation to what may or may not have been said by the prophet himself, but in relation to the present literary form of Isa. vii 1-17. I shall conclude with a proposal on the nature of faith in Isa. vii that is based on the final form and position of the chapter in the book.” Wong seems to have moved towards a canonical critical position.

Isaiah. An example of this might be indicated by Wong's approach. After his introduction he begins, not surprisingly, by exegeting at length Is. 7:1-17¹⁶ and 28:14-18, as both passages contain an occurrence of the hiphil of the root יָנַח . Yet, it is interesting to note that, although Wong mentions that some scholars have drawn attention to the parallels between ch.7 and chs. 36-39, he does not discuss these in any detail or exegete the latter chapters.¹⁷ Presumably, this is because he does not classify Isa. 36-39 as being "authentic" Isaiah of Jerusalem.

Thirdly, *Coram Deo* is the title of a recent book, in which Hagelia sets out to study Yahwistic spirituality, as found in the context of the book of Isaiah.¹⁸ Prominence is given to the root יָנַח , but a study of one hundred Hebrew terms in the semantic fields of sensing, emotion, motion, religious acting and consummation is also included. Terms were chosen which were understood to describe man's relationship with God. The treatment of these words is usually brief, and seems to provide little more information than could be extracted from a standard theological dictionary such as *NIDOTTE* or *TDOT*. An exegesis of the whole book of Isaiah follows, which serves to provide a contextual analysis for the terminology of spirituality. The text of Isaiah was studied in separate pericopes, which the author has determined himself. Hagelia includes the section, Isa. 36-39 as part of his contextual analysis, and notes in particular the emphasis on trust and prayer in these chapters.¹⁹ Confessional statements about God, expressed by the use of various epithets including divine terms, ethical creation terms, royal terms, military terms, anthropological terms and family terms, are also examined. Interestingly, Hezekiah's prayers (Isa. 37:14-20 and 38:1-8) form the basis of two out of four case studies, which Hagelia presents at the end of the

¹⁶ Wong's exegesis of Isa. 7 will be considered in chapter six, where the theme of faith in the book of Isaiah and how chs. 36-39 relate to the rest of the book will be examined.

¹⁷ Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 7, note 14.

¹⁸ Halvard Hagelia, *Coram Deo: Spirituality in the Book of Isaiah with Particular Attention to Faith in Yahweh* (ConBOT 49; Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2001).

¹⁹ Hagelia, *Coram Deo*, pp. 238-245.

book “as concrete examples of piety.”²⁰ There are brief exegeses of Isa. 38:3, 38:18 and 39:8, all centred on the word אֱמֶת.²¹ Hagelia’s work is very relevant to this study, but his remit includes many terms other than אֱמֶת and בְּטָח. He also tries to survey the whole of the book of Isaiah, not just the Hezekiah narratives.

In articles and books which deal in general with the theme of faith in the Old Testament, the אֱמֶת root is often discussed, while the verb בְּטָח is given less attention. This may explain why, despite the repeated use of the latter in 2 Kgs 18-19, Hezekiah is rarely discussed. When studies concentrate on the book of Isaiah, Hezekiah is given little attention, except in the case of Hagelia’s study. This seems to be because a historical-critical viewpoint, combined with a narrow focus on the אֱמֶת root at the expense of the בְּטָח root in some cases, skews the focus of the study away from parts of the book of Isaiah not considered to have been written by Isaiah of Jerusalem. It should be noted that there appears to be no work on the book of Kings or the so-called Deuteronomistic History that has focused on the theme of faith.

On the other hand, there have been many studies of the Hezekiah narratives, which are found in 2 Kgs 18-20 and largely paralleled in Isa. 36-39. These have taken various approaches to the text. Many are concerned with the narratives from a historical perspective, which is hardly surprising given the chronological difficulties of the account.²² Some have concentrated on

²⁰ Hagelia, *Coram Deo*, Preface (unnumbered page). The other two are Isa. 6:1-13 and 52:13-53:12.

²¹ Hagelia, *Coram Deo*, pp. 43-45.

²² For a recent study (with bibliography) of the historical questions relating to 2 Kings 18-20/Isa. 36-39 see William R. Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah*, (SHCANE 18; Leiden: Brill, 1999). Danna N. Fewell, (“Sennacherib’s Defeat: Words at War in 2 Kings 18.13-19.37”, *JSOT* 34 [1986], pp. 79-90 [87, n. 2]) also provides a select bibliography. For a brief attempt at a synoptic historical reconstruction of the events surrounding Sennacherib’s invasion based on Kings, Isaiah, Chronicles, and the Assyrian text, see Iain W. Provan, “In the Stable with the Dwarves: Testimony, Interpretation, Faith and the History of Israel”, in A. Lemaire and M. Sæbø (eds.), *Congress Volume: Oslo 1998* (IOSOT; VTSup, 80; Leiden: Brill, 2000).

questions of textual criticism,²³ while others are largely concerned with redactional questions about the narratives.²⁴ There are a few studies that have taken the literary aspects of the Hezekiah narratives seriously,²⁵ but none that focuses specifically on the theme of faith in these narratives. This study is concerned with literary and theological questions rather than purely historical and redactional matters. This is naturally reflected in the choice of secondary literature.

This review of research on the narratives is brief and selective. It includes works that may be seen to presage a more literary and/or theological interpretation. Several recent PhD theses are also included, as these may be less well known. The 1967 study by Brevard Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, is largely concerned with the impasse reached by historical studies of 2 Kgs 18-19. This he attempts to tackle by analysing oracles in the Isaianic tradition from a form critical viewpoint.²⁶ He admits that the results are mainly negative with reference to the historical problem, but he also considers theological matters. He accepts the long-accepted divisions

²³ See, for example, Alessandro Catastini, *Isaia Ed Ezechia: Studio Di Storia Della Tradizione Di Il Re 18-20, Is. 36-39*, (Studi Semitici; Nuova Ser., 6; Rome: Università degli studi "La Sapienza", 1989). There is an English summary of the work on pp. 321-326; Raymond F. Person, *The Kings-Isaiah and Kings-Jeremiah Recensions* (BZAW 252; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1997). Person uses textual criticism in an attempt to reconstruct the *Urtext* of 2 Kgs 18:13-20:19. He then uses this as a basis to critique redaction-critical studies.

²⁴ See, for example, Ludger Camp, *Hiskija und Hiskijabild: Analyse und Interpretation von 2 Kön 18-20* (Münsteraner Theologische Abhandlungen, 9; Altenberge, 1990), who discusses several redaction models of the Deuteronomistic History and the theological outlooks of the various redactions that he accepts. Camp also addresses some historical questions. The studies of Smelik and Seitz on the Isaianic version of the narratives are discussed below in ch. 6. See Klaas A. D. Smelik, *Converting the Past: Studies in Ancient Israelite and Moabite Historiography*, (OTS, 28; Leiden: Brill, 1992). (Chapter 4 appears to be a revision and expansion of Klaas A.D. Smelik, "Distortion of Old Testament Prophecy; The Purpose of Isaiah xxxvi and xxxvii", in A.S. van der Woude [ed.], *Crises and Perspectives: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Polytheism, Biblical Theology, Palestinian Archaeology and Intertestamental Literature* [OTS, 24; Leiden: Brill, 1986], pp. 70-93); Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah: A Reassessment of Isaiah 36-39* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

²⁵ See in particular, Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat"; John H. Hull Jr., *Hezekiah - Saint and Sinner: A Conceptual and Contextual Narrative Analysis of 2 Kings 18-20* (unpublished PhD thesis; The Claremont Graduate School, 1994); Dominic Rudman, "Is the Rabshakeh Also Among the Prophets? A Rhetorical Study of 2 Kings XVIII 17-35", *VT* 50 (2000), pp. 100-110.

²⁶ As Hull (*Hezekiah*, p. 30) notes, he also focuses a great deal on tradition history.

of the narrative into three accounts, 18:13-16 (A); 18:17-19:9a, 36-37 (B1); 19:9b-35 (B2).²⁷ He assesses account A to be highly accurate in historical terms, because it agrees closely with the Assyrian annals. With regard to the other accounts, he considers B1 to be more historically accurate than B2, but this, he argues, should not determine theological value.²⁸ In particular, he recognizes the emphasis that is placed in B2 upon the character of Hezekiah as a pious king. Childs' final remarks prepare the way for his later works where he considers books or texts in their canonical contexts. He summarizes his position thus: "The problem of developing theological norms with which to evaluate the diversity within the Old Testament finally forces the interpreter outside the context of the Old Testament and raises the broader questions of Scripture and canon."²⁹ Childs does not focus particularly on faith, but he does suggest that the texts might be better understood from a theological rather than a historical perspective.

Ronald Clements in *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem* accepts account A (18:13-16) as historical, whereas account B is taken to be a composite narrative, consisting of two accounts, which have been developed in a theological direction, and which were combined during Josiah's reign. Account B is seen largely to parallel Account A except for the inclusion of 19:35, which ascribes the deliverance of Jerusalem to the angel of YHWH. The problem presented by Account B is not a historical one in Clements' view, but "a literary and theological problem concerning the origin and purpose of the narrative of 2 Kings 18:17-19:37 which views in a very special light the fact that Jerusalem did not suffer the torments and destruction which befell most of the rest of Judah."³⁰ Clements believes that the way in which the confrontation between Hezekiah and Sennacherib

²⁷ The exact divisions of source B are debated by some scholars. The original idea of the divisions is credited to B. Stade, "Anmerkungen zu 2 Kð. 15-21", *ZAW* 6 (1886), pp. 172-183.

²⁸ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis* (London: SCM Press, 1967), pp. 123-124.

²⁹ Childs, *Assyrian Crisis*, p. 127.

³⁰ Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah and the Deliverance of Jerusalem: A Study of the Interpretation of Prophecy in the Old Testament* (JSOTSup, 13; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), p. 92.

came to be remembered was due to the conviction that Jerusalem was inviolable.³¹ Both Childs and Clements are concerned with historical questions, and use similar methods. However, whereas Childs argues that new extra-biblical evidence would be needed to solve the historical problems, Clements assumes that at least the outline of the events was already known.³² Both also recognize in their own ways the importance of theological influence on the redaction of the narratives.

Danna Fewell wrote a short article on 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37 called "Sennacherib's Defeat: Words at War in 2 Kings 18.13-19.37", in which she endeavoured to show that this passage in its final form was constructed to communicate meanings not patent in the separate pericopes that were demarcated by form-critical methods. Although brief, her study is important, because she has focused upon literary features such as narrative techniques, characterization, and *leit-motifs*. She concludes that the passage is a cohesive unit in which the themes of hearing and speaking are pre-eminent. She notes the repetition of the word "trust" (בְּטַח) and "deliver" (נָצַל), which are important for the present study,³³ but sees the account more as "... an ironic story about words, offensive words and words of rebuke, blasphemous words and words of judgment. It is a story that depicts the deliverance of Jerusalem to be Yahweh's assertion of autonomy over life and death in the face of the Assyrian counter-claim."³⁴

Christof Hardmeier in *Prophetie im Streit vor dem Untergang Judas* introduces a novel reading of the narrative in that he suggests that it does not primarily refer to the events of 701, but is to be read in connection with a

³¹ Others believe that this tradition was already existent in the Isaiah tradition. See, for example, Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings* (AB, 11; New York: Doubleday & Co., 1988), p. 244 n. 12; Childs, *Assyrian Crisis*, pp. 50-63.

³² Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 30.

³³ Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat", p. 85.

³⁴ Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat", p. 87.

pause in the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.³⁵ The story is viewed as a fictional narrative written after the events of 588.³⁶ The narrative found in Jer. 37-40 is, according to Hardmeier, the reason why 2 Kgs 18:9-19:37 was written. The Kings narrative was written as a propaganda piece in response to Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The aim was to encourage defiance on Zedekiah's part against Nebuchadnezzar. Hardmeier's thesis has the advantage of explaining the strange sequence of events, where siege is laid to Jerusalem after the payment of tribute. His interpretation may be innovative, but it means that his interpretation is constantly skewed to understanding the narrative in the light of the events of 588. Hardmeier's methodology is also out of the ordinary in that it combines both historical criticism and narrative analysis, yet he only accommodates the latter to a degree. For example, he presupposes the B1/B2 sources, treating them as parallels, as have many scholars before him.

In recent years, at least four Ph.D. theses have been written about the Hezekiah narratives. The first, *Hezekiah in Biblical Tradition*, is by August H. Konkell, who begins by considering the reported events as the object of historical enquiry and includes discussion of the chronological problems that have been raised, and the use of various sources. Then he discusses the narratives as they are recorded respectively, in the Deuteronomistic History, in the book of Isaiah, and in the book of Chronicles.³⁷ The focus of the thesis is a historical one, but Konkell also discusses the Hezekiah narratives in relation to the theology of the book of Kings in ch. 8, and the redactional question of the relationship between the narratives in Kings and the book of Isaiah in ch. 9.

³⁵ Christof Hardmeier, *Prophezie im Streit vor dem Untergang Judas: Erzählkommunikative Studien zur Entstehungssituation der Jesaja- und Jeremiaerzählungen in II Reg 18-20 und Jer. 37-40* (BZAW, 187; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1990).

³⁶ Arie van der Kooij ("The Story of Hezekiah and Sennacherib [2 Kings 18-19]: A Sample of Ancient Historiography", in Johannes C. de Moor and Harry F. van Rooy [eds.], *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* [Leiden: Brill, 2000], pp. 107-119 [117-118]) questions the closeness of the supposed parallelism between account B1 and the events of 588.

³⁷ August H. Konkell, *Hezekiah in Biblical Tradition* (unpublished PhD thesis; Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987).

The second by John H. Hull, *Hezekiah - Saint and Sinner: A Conceptual and Contextual Narrative Analysis of 2 Kings 18-20*, is the longest and most detailed of these theses. It was completed in 1994. His main concern is with the narratives recorded in 2 Kgs 18-20 and especially the characterization of Hezekiah in those chapters. His subtitle is “A Conceptual and Contextual Narrative Analysis of 2 Kings 18-20”. The first aspect indicates Hull’s concern with the subsurface meaning of individual words found in the text of these narratives. His method involves an investigation into the use of a particular term in other texts especially within the context of the books of Kings, but sometimes also in the larger contexts of Samuel-Kings or Deuteronomy-Kings. To examine the meaning and uses of a particular term in various contexts is perfectly legitimate. However, to import meaning from another context into the passage under consideration and suggest that there must be a subsurface meaning, which might be contrary to the surface meaning, seems a questionable pursuit. It appears to be analogous to a kind of structuralism, where the deep structures of a text are sought in order to ascertain the meaning of the text. The present study is concerned with the linear progression and surface meaning of the narrative, rather than subsurface meanings or structures.

The second aspect is the contextual. Hull considers “...that the context may have an important effect on the meaning of the text and the coherence of its message.”³⁸ Thus, Hull examines the structural framework of the entire book of Kings. He notes that the Kings context, and its effect upon the meaning of the narratives, had largely been ignored before his study.³⁹

Hull also indicates that his study is influenced by narrative theory, and discusses the distinctions commonly made between real author, implied author and narrator.⁴⁰ Yet he maintains that his study is not a strictly

³⁸ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 55.

³⁹ For discussion of this topic, see ch. 5.

⁴⁰ Hull, *Hezekiah*, pp. 57-58.

narratological one. He claims to be working within the realms of historical criticism, using insights from form criticism and concept criticism. Narratology is utilized in specific instances where semantic issues are raised.⁴¹ However, it is not clear what Hull understands by “historical criticism” when he states, “These aspects of ‘historical criticism’ are actually more oriented toward semantic interpretation of literature rather than reconstruction of literary history.”⁴² He appears to have moved away from historical criticism, as most scholars would understand that term, to a literary study that mixes several kinds of criticism. Although Hull’s work is very detailed and includes many insights from a narrative critical viewpoint, his methodology is somewhat eclectic, nor does it focus on the theme of faith.

The third thesis, *The Defense of Zion and the House of David: Isaiah 36-39 in the Context of Isaiah 1-39*, was written by Dora R. Mbuwayesango. It is concerned primarily with the Hezekiah narratives in the context of the book of Isaiah.⁴³ It is Mbuwayesango’s contention that Isa. 36-39 is primarily related to the first part of Isaiah and not to Deutero-Isaiah. She admits that, although certain evidence supports her thesis, it is not strong enough to make a fully convincing case.

Lastly, the University of Sydney, Australia has recently accepted a PhD thesis entitled *For My Eyes Have Seen the King: Kingship, Human and Divine in the Book of Isaiah* by Gregory Goswell.⁴⁴ A major part of the thesis is apparently concerned with Isa. 36-39. It has not been possible to see the completed thesis, but a draft of the chapter on Isa. 39 was kindly made available by the author.

⁴¹ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 62.

⁴² Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 62.

⁴³ Dora R. Mbuwayesango, *The Defense of Zion and the House of David: Isaiah 36-39 in the Context of Isaiah 1-39* (unpublished PhD thesis; Emory University, 1998).

⁴⁴ Gregory Goswell, *For My Eyes Have Seen the King: Kingship, Human and Divine in the Book of Isaiah* (unpublished PhD thesis; University of Sydney, 2002).

Some books of Old Testament theology include sections on faith or, more broadly, human responses to God. It may be worthwhile to consider some representative volumes. In his *Old Testament Theology Volume Two*, Gerhard von Rad discusses Old Testament statements regarding faith and the hiddenness of God in the chapter on “The Old Testament Saving Event in the Light of the New Testament Fulfilment”.⁴⁵ His discussion of faith terminology includes the אָמֵן root,⁴⁶ and he recognizes that the use of a specific term such as אֱמוּנָה is not always present even when a story is clearly about faith. However, it is noteworthy that Hezekiah is not mentioned in this section, but is discussed in a negative way earlier in his chapter on “Isaiah and Micah”, when von Rad understands Hezekiah’s payment of tribute to Sennacherib to be “an act of political common-sense”,⁴⁷ but not one of faith in eyes of Isaiah.

Walther Eichrodt has a section entitled “Faith in God” in his well-known *Theology of the Old Testament*.⁴⁸ He mentions Hezekiah as one who is offered help by God, but who is also called by God to surrender himself to “...the new and unexpected will of God in his particular historical situation.”⁴⁹

Walther Zimmerli offers a brief summation of his understanding of the אָמֵן root in his section on “The Response of Obedience”,⁵⁰ but mention of the Hezekiah narratives is found rather in the section entitled, “Judgment and

⁴⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II: The Theology of Israel’s Prophetic Traditions* (London: SCM Press, 1965), pp. 357-387.

⁴⁶ Von Rad, *Theology II*, pp. 378-382.

⁴⁷ Von Rad, *Theology II*, p. 166.

⁴⁸ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament II* (London: SCM Press, 1967), pp. 277-290.

⁴⁹ Eichrodt, *Theology II*, p. 281.

⁵⁰ Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978), pp. 146-48.

salvation in the Preaching of the Great literary Prophets", where the deliverance of Jerusalem is seen as fulfilment of Isaianic prophecy.⁵¹

Preuss includes a section in his *Old Testament Theology* entitled "Humanity before God"⁵² in which he incorporates discussion of the אָמֵן root and the verb אָמַן ; passing reference only is made to Isa. 36:4, 7 and 37:10.⁵³ Brevard S. Childs includes a chapter on "Biblical Faith" in his *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*,⁵⁴ but no mention of the Hezekiah narratives is made. There is no substantial section on faith in Jacob's *Theology of the Old Testament*,⁵⁵ although there are scattered references. However, no reference is made to Hezekiah.

Walter Brueggemann in his *Theology of the Old Testament* has a brief section entitled "Primal Trust"⁵⁶ within the larger section "The Human Person as Yahweh's Partner". Reference is made in a footnote to the theme of trust in Isa. 36-37.⁵⁷

In *Contours of Old Testament Theology* by Bernhard Anderson,⁵⁸ the topic of faith is dealt with in small sections scattered throughout the book, which is organized mainly according to the various covenants found in the Old Testament. The Hezekiah narratives are not mentioned in connection with faith.

⁵¹ Zimmerli, *Theology*, p. 197.

⁵² Horst Dietrich Preuss, *Old Testament Theology II* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), pp. 153-170.

⁵³ Preuss, *Theology II*, p. 165.

⁵⁴ B.S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible* (London: SCM, 1992), pp. 595-623, especially pp. 595-601.

⁵⁵ Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958; first French edition 1955).

⁵⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 466-470.

⁵⁷ Brueggemann, *Theology*, p. 468 n. 37.

⁵⁸ Bernhard W. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999).

Methodology

This study concentrates upon the received form of the text as found in what is now termed the canon. In this respect, it would be difficult to underestimate the influence of Brevard Childs, who, while not disregarding the prehistory of the text, has sought to shift the emphasis away from diachronic concerns to the structure of the texts themselves.

The main approach of the present study, however, might be termed narrative criticism. It is taken as given that 2 Kgs 18-20 and the parallel version in Isa. 36-39 is a series of narratives.⁵⁹ "By narrative we mean a story or an account of events and participants who move through time and space, a recital with a beginning, a middle and end."⁶⁰ Several handbooks dealing with the literary interpretation of biblical narrative have been utilized.⁶¹ It is not possible to enter into detailed discussion of the differences between the authors of these books, or the pros and cons of their methods here.⁶² However, it is worth noting that one of the advantages of this type of approach is that attention is concentrated more on the text and less on issues about the text. Some knowledge of social and historical issues may be necessary, but the major concern is a close reading of the text. It is possible through a narrative approach to gain insights into the meaning of a text, even though there are questions regarding the origin and/or historical value of sources, as is the case with the Hezekiah narratives. A second advantage,

⁵⁹ The poetic section in Isa. 38:9-20 is not examined in detail in this study. This is because the study is intended to focus on narrative, and because of space.

⁶⁰ Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p. 15.

⁶¹ Jacob Licht, *Storytelling in the Bible* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1978); Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (BLS, 9; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (ILBS; Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985); S. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (BLS, 17; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989); Mark A. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Mark A. Powell, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992); Jan P. Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: A Practical Guide* (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 1999).

⁶² A useful summary is found in Powell, *Narrative Criticism*, pp. 85-98. Although Powell is concerned especially with the Gospels of the New Testament, the same principles apply to most biblical narrative.

which goes beyond the academic field, might also be mentioned: such understanding of a text may unleash the power for personal or social transformation. Stories are often attractive, because they may seem to correspond to reality. People are able to identify with many of the characters and situations, and they find themselves drawn into a story in such a way that they are affected by it.

This study is concerned particularly with the theological aspects of 2 Kgs 18-20 and the parallel text of Isa. 36-39, especially with the theme of faith. As defined by Cuddon "... the theme of a work is not its subject but rather its central idea which may be stated directly or indirectly."⁶³ This is a theme which could be traced throughout the Bible. As Heiler has stated in his classic work on prayer: "'Faith,' 'trust,' 'confidence' - that is the *leitmotif* which sounds through the entire literature of the Old and New Testaments..."⁶⁴ In 2 Kgs 18-19 the theme is clearly manifest. The statement of incomparability near the beginning of the section is strong evidence: "He trusted (בָּטַח) in the Lord the God of Israel; so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him" (2 Kgs 18:5). This summary statement of Hezekiah's faith is significantly placed in the opening section of the narrative and appears to set the theme for subsequent pericopes. The verses surrounding this statement further strengthen this view of Hezekiah as an example of faith. His actions were right in God's eyes, and were according to the pattern of his ancestor David (18:3). The next verse records some of these actions and 18:5-6 indicate the provenance of his actions. The verb בָּטַח

⁶³ J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin, 3rd ed., 1992) p. 969.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion* (New York: OUP, 1937), pp.143-144. Perhaps it should be made noted that this is a Christian reading of the Old Testament. While the terms Heiler uses are important in the Old Testament vocabulary of the response of humans to God, it should be noted that the Old Testament uses a broader range of terms, of which "fear" (יִרָא) and obey (שָׁמַע) are among the commonest.

appears nine times altogether in 2 Kgs 18-19.⁶⁵ Although statistics on their own may be misleading, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that אֱמַנָה is used as a *leitmotif* in this narrative. Admittedly, this verb is not found in ch. 20. However, this study will examine the possible connections between chs. 18-19 and ch. 20. It is intended to investigate whether there are indications of the theme of faith in ch. 20, even though the verb אֱמַנָה is absent.

Although lexical questions are important, it should be borne in mind that this study is mainly a narrative analysis of the text. Therefore, it is the context in which terms such as אֱמַנָה is found that is important as well. In recent years, there has been a move away from concentrating on individual words as units of meaning to considering sentences and pericopes as the contexts of words that are vital for the determination of the meaning of word. By a narrative approach, it is hoped to examine the settings, plots, characters, and points of view in the specified passages to determine not only what אֱמַנָה means, but also how it is seen to operate in concrete situations. How and to what extent Hezekiah is portrayed in these narratives as an example of faith will also be investigated.

To summarize, articles and books on “faith” in the Old Testament, and works even on the theme in relation to the book of Isaiah, rarely mention Hezekiah as an example of faith. Studies that give attention to the Hezekiah narratives have until recently concentrated on historical, redactional or textual problems. With the application of new literary-critical methods to the study of the biblical text, it seems appropriate to investigate the narratives of 2 Kgs 18-20 and Isa. 36-39 once more, this time from a narrative-critical viewpoint, and with particular attention to the theme of faith.

⁶⁵ 2 Kgs 18:5, 19, 20, 21(twice), 22, 24, 30; 19:10. The noun בְּטָחוֹן (confidence) is also found in 2 Kgs 18:19.

Chapter One - Exegesis of 2 Kings 18:1-12

Introduction

Whilst much of the material in the Hezekiah narratives is paralleled in Isa. 36-39, this section, 2 Kgs. 18:1-12, is peculiar to Kings. It is a comparatively long narrative summary¹ and begins with a regnal formula typical of the Books of Kings, which includes an evaluation in theological terms of Hezekiah's reign. After the general information concerning the reign (vv. 1-2), a theological evaluation of Hezekiah is offered in very positive terms in v. 3, which is illustrated by a record of Hezekiah's reforms in v. 4. Further positive evaluations are made in vv. 5-6, which are followed by general statements regarding Hezekiah's military successes (vv. 7-8). The narration continues in vv. 9-12 with a military report about the siege of Samaria and its results (vv. 9-11). The final verse of the section (v. 12) gives a theological comment on the reason for the fall of Samaria and the deportation of its inhabitants.

The purpose of the introductory section (vv. 1-8) appears to be to set the theme for the narratives that follow. Hezekiah's reign is introduced and the theological evaluations and the records of his actions summarize the characterization of the king. As Long states, "This king's time is marked by religious reform and fervent devotion, even in the midst of rebellion. Indeed, the implied successes in rebellion against Assyria (v. 7b) and in prevailing over former vassals of Assyria (v. 8) come as blessing from a God who rewards the good king (v. 7a), just as he had done with David (2 Sam 8:1-14)."² Of especial interest for the purposes of this study is the fact that Hezekiah is acclaimed as the king who trusts in YHWH *par*

¹ According to Alter (*Narrative*, p. 65), dialogue is often found to take the primary role in narrative and narration is often subsidiary to the dialogue, but later he also notes that there are extended sections of narration with little or no dialogue, especially in Kings where narration is used to provide a chronicle of public events. Such sections "... are intended to chronicle wars and political intrigues, national cultic trespasses and their supposed historical consequences. The fictional imagination, which creates individualized personages grappling with one another and with circumstances to realize their destinies, is dilute in these passages." (p. 75).

² Burke O. Long, *2 Kings* (FOTL, 10; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 196.

excellence. After this introductory section, but before the detailed accounts of the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign and especially Sennacherib's besieging of Jerusalem and the miraculous deliverance of the Davidic king and his city (2 Kgs. 18:13-19:37), comes the short narrative section regarding Samaria and its fate (18:9-12). This might appear to be an unnecessary interruption in the narratives that focus on the Judean king, yet its inclusion serves a useful purpose for the author/redactor. The reader is reminded of what happened to the northern kingdom when its inhabitants turned their back on YHWH and his covenant. It is soon to be revealed that the southern kingdom may face a similar fate. This pericope highlights the contrast between the kingdoms, not militarily, but theologically. Thus Long states: "Recapitulation of Samaria's defeat reinforces a contrastive lesson: the north failed because of its transgression of covenant (v. 12), but Judah will live on because of Hezekiah's 'trust' in Yahweh..."³

The information related in 18:1-12 provides indications of the character of Hezekiah and summarizes very briefly some of his actions, such as his reforms and victories over the Philistines. Here there is no intention that the reader should linger over these events. They are not the "main feature" of the programme. Rather this section includes information in the form of theological judgements and vignettes that prepare the way for the much more detailed and unhurried, deliberate narrative regarding the siege of Jerusalem and Hezekiah's response to it.

Regnal formula (18:1-2)

Chapter 18 is introduced by the word יָדָה. This is the only place in Kings where this verb is used to introduce a regnal formula and marks "...the last of the long series of reigns introduced by the synchronistic accession

³ Long, *2 Kings*, p. 198, following E. Würthwein, *Die Bücher der Könige: 1 Kön. 17-2 Kön. 25.* (ATD, 11.2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984), p. 410 and T.R. Hobbs, *2 Kings* (WBC, 13; Waco: Word Books, 1985), pp. 246-247.

formula.”⁴ Possibly that is why it is used here (unless it is merely stylistic variation). Cohn describes it as “punctuating” and suggests that its use “signals that the report to be given about Hezekiah of Judah in vv. 3-7, will differ from those of his predecessors.”⁵ Certainly a clear contrast is about to be drawn between Hezekiah and his father, Ahaz.⁶ Whereas Ahaz “did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done” (2 Kgs. 16:2), Hezekiah did (v. 3).⁷ יְהִי is found at several points in the Hezekiah narratives and although it appears sometimes to signal the beginning of a unit, more often it occurs within a unit and appears to emphasize a dramatic turn of events. Compare 18:9; 19:1, 35, 37; 20:4.⁸ Even its occurrence in 18:1 is not seen by Hull as the beginning of a unit in what he calls “the highest level of structural organization in Kings.” For Hull, the term occurs at the turning point within the fifth section of the book according to his analysis.⁹ Yet, it should be noted that he might be building too much on what is a very common idiom.

The introductory parts of the regnal formula, which are customary in the Books of Kings, then follow.¹⁰ Up to ten elements comprise the

⁴ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 192 n. 29.

⁵ Robert L. Cohn, *2 Kings* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), p. 125.

⁶ This assumes that this is their relationship. Because of chronological problems within Kings, at least one writer has queried whether Ahaz was in fact the father of Hezekiah. See Donald V. Etz, “The Genealogical Relationships of Jehoram and Ahaziah, and of Ahaz and Hezekiah, Kings of Judah”, *JSOT* 71 (1996), pp. 39-53, especially pp. 50-52.

⁷ Both H. Weippert (“Die ‘deuteronomistischen’ Beurteilungen der Könige von Israel und Juda und das Problem der Redaktion der Königsbücher”, *Bib* 53 [1972], pp. 301-339 [310-311]) and W. Boyd Barrick (“On the ‘Removal of the “High Places”’ in 1-2 Kings”, *Bib* 55 [1974], pp. 257-259 [258]) draw attention to the fact that it is not the people who are mentioned as sacrificing at the מִזְבֵּחַ, but the king (Ahaz) himself this time.

⁸ See Hull, *Hezekiah*, pp. 222-225.

⁹ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 225. Hull (*Hezekiah*, pp. 157-158) divides the text of the Books of Kings into the following sections: 1 Kgs. 1:1-11:43; 12:1-15:24; 15:25-2 Kgs. 11-20; 12:1-14:29; 15:1-20:21; 21:1-23:30; 23:31-25:30.

¹⁰ Such formulae have been recognized for many years; see, for example, C.F. Burney, *Notes on the Hebrew Text of the Books of Kings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903), pp. ix-xii. See also Burke O. Long, *1 Kings with an Introduction to Historical Literature* (FOTL, 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), pp. 158-165. Long calls the formulae “regnal résumés” and briefly compares them with examples from Mesopotamian literature. He believes that the Babylonian and Assyrian scribes may have provided models for the author/redactor of Kings (p. 164).

framework of these formulae in respect of Judean kings. The first six of these are found at the beginning of a narrative.¹¹ First, the beginning of the Judean king's reign is synchronized with the regnal year of the Israelite king up to the time of Hoshea; thus, "In the third year of Hoshea son of Elah, king of Israel, Hezekiah the son of Ahaz, king of Judah, began to reign" (18:1).¹² Synchronization between the events of the two kingdoms is common in Kings, and this means that narrative time is often reversed when there is a switch from one kingdom to the other.¹³ Secondly, the king's age is given; thus, "He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign" (18:2). This is followed by the length of his reign and the name of the capital city: "and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem" (18:2). Fifthly, the name of the queen mother is given: "His mother's name was Abi the daughter of Zechariah" (18:2). The sixth element is a judgement formula or "theological appraisal"¹⁴ and brings the introductory section to a climax. Several detailed discussions of the regnal formulae, and in

¹¹ The other elements usually occur at the end of the record of a king's life, and are often referred to as "death and burial notices".

¹² If the synchronism with the kings of Israel is omitted, there are similarities between the formula for Judean kings and the introductory formulae found in the Books of Samuel, as S.R. Bin-Nun ("Formulas from the Royal Records of Israel and of Judah", *VT* 18 [1968], pp. 420-421) has observed. Thus "Twenty-five years old was Hezekiah when he began to reign and twenty-nine years he reigned in Jerusalem ..." (2 Kgs. 18:2; own translation) is similar to "... years old was Saul when he began to reign, and for ... and two years he reigned over Israel" (1 Sam. 13:1; own translation) or "Thirty years old was David when he began to reign, and for forty years he reigned" (2 Sam. 5:4; own translation). Cf. also 2 Sam. 2:10. Therefore, it would appear that the introductory formula for the kings of the southern kingdom is not just a standard form of introduction to royal narrative in the Books of Kings, but may go back to the time of Saul or David, or at least to a person who drew up such king lists. The synchronism with the northern kings may well be a later addition. As Bin-Nun ("Formulas", p. 426) argues, "It stands to reason that the records of a king, whether annals or entries in a king-list, began with the king's name or with his regnal year, but not with the name and year of a neighbouring king, not even if they were on friendly terms. The parallel phrasing of all synchronisms for the kings of Judah and nearly all the kings of Israel and their place at the head of the formulas disclose a later hand, that attempted to bring all the kings of both states under a common frame."

¹³ In synchronic narratives in the Bible, time is not usually reversed, but the Books of Kings form not one narrative, but a large composition of narratives. See Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, pp. 172-173.

¹⁴ Long, *2 Kings*, p. 160. Anthony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien (*Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text* [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000], p. 33) basing their analysis on the judgement formulae, argue that four basic patterns exist: "A, for the northern kings from Jehu to Hoshea (northern kingdom: middle to end); B, for the southern kings from Rehoboam to Hezekiah (beginning to near-end); C, for the northern kings from Jeroboam to Joram (northern kingdom: beginning to middle); and a fourth pattern, D, for the last four kings of Judah."

particular, the judgement formulae, found in the Books of Kings have been published.¹⁵ Their main concern, however, is in connection with the growth and redaction of the Books of Kings, and consequently they are not of direct relevance to a literary examination of the text.

Theological appraisal (18:3-6)

The frequent use of the regnal formula with its theological appraisal means that it is common in the Books of Kings, as compared with other parts of the Old Testament, for the narrator to pass judgement upon a character. Alter argues that an explicit statement about the attitudes, feelings or intentions of a personage is the most certain way of revealing character in a biblical narrative.¹⁶ By means of such judgements, the reader's attention is shifted "from the level of the narrated events to that of the narrator."¹⁷ This has the effect of creating distance between the reader and the character and reduces "the reader's emotional involvement," enabling the reader "to see the events dispassionately"¹⁸ and to understand the narrative in the way the author/redactor intends. Bar-Efrat argues that judgements and other explanations given by the narrator help to explain the motives of the characters and mould the reader's attitude to the characters, preventing a possible wrong interpretation of them, at least in the narrator's eyes.¹⁹ It must be accepted, therefore, that the narrator is not

¹⁵ Bin-Nun, "Formulas", pp. 414-432; Stefan Timm, *Die Dynastie Omri. Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte Israels im 9. Jahrhundert vor Christus* (FRLANT, 124; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), pp. 14-40; Weippert, "Beurteilungen", pp. 301-339. Anthony F. Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings: A Late Ninth-Century Document (1 Samuel-2 Kings 10)* (CBQMS, 17; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1986), pp. 139-202; André Lemaire, "Vers l'histoire de la rédaction des livres des Rois", *ZAW* 98 (1986), pp. 221-236; Iain W. Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings: A Contribution to the Debate about the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (BZAW, 172; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1988), pp. 33-90; E. Ben Zvi, "The Account of the Reign of Manasseh in II Reg 21, 1-18 and the Redaction History of the Books of Kings", *ZAW* 103 (1991), pp. 355-373; B. Halpern and D.S. Vanderhooft, "The Editions of Kings in the 7th-6th Centuries B.C.E." *HUCA* 62 (1991), pp. 179-244; Erik Eynikel, *The Reform of King Josiah and the Composition of the Deuteronomistic History* (OTS, 33; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), pp. 33-135; Richard D. Nelson, *The Double Redaction of the Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup, 18; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), pp. 29-42.

¹⁶ Alter, *Narrative*, p. 117.

¹⁷ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, p. 29.

¹⁸ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, p. 31.

¹⁹ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, pp. 30-31.

necessarily unbiased in his judgement of a character, and there can be little doubt that in the case of Hezekiah, the narrator sees Hezekiah as the hero who cannot put a foot wrong, at least initially.

It is generally agreed that the narrator is regarded as omniscient,²⁰ having the ability to know facts about people, including their inner thoughts, emotions and will. Direct characterization, which often involves a judgement of personality or character, is found in several places in the Old Testament, but probably is placed more often in the mouth of another character (including God)²¹ than supplied directly by the narrator. Bar-Efrat asserts: "What is evident is that the trait noted by the narrator is always extremely important in the development of the plot. Furthermore, the quality denoted through direct characterization almost always emerges indirectly, too, through either the actions or speech of the character involved or through both of them."²² However, Bar-Efrat fails to discuss the fact that some actions or words of the character may not always reflect the epithet ascribed to them. This is true, for example in the case of Solomon. As Sternberg states, "In Solomon's unfolding the retrospective twist is most pronounced. The opening chapters of Kings give an overwhelming impression of his wisdom: they trace its divine origin, dramatize it through illustrative scenes, even allot to it a whole descriptive paragraph unrivalled in specificity and superlatives (5:9-14) ... however, the initial epithet serves not so much to guide as to lure and frustrate normal expectation: to drive home in retrospect the ironic distance between the character's auspicious potential under God and his miserable

²⁰ See, for example, Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, pp. 17-23; Berlin, *Poetics*, pp. 43, 52; Sternberg, *Poetics*, p. 12. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, p. 56. It is not possible to discuss whether the narrator should be regarded as omniscient. This may be a claim too far. However, there seems little doubt that he or she is often privileged to knowledge not available to the characters.

²¹ In this respect, God may be treated as another character within the narrative, as the narrator can apparently discern even his inner feelings at times. The viewpoint of the narrator and God may not necessarily be the same, but in practice they will often appear to be. Sternberg (*Poetics*, p. 154) states, "...the narrator moves beyond or parallel to God's viewpoint without challenging its authority."

²² Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, p. 53.

performance in opposition to God.”²³ Furthermore, as Sternberg indicates, “Even morally directed epithets turn equivocal as the plot goes forward.”²⁴ Thus, we read that “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God” (Gen. 6:9) and that “Job was blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil” (Job 1:1). Bar-Efrat includes these among his examples, but fails to note, as Sternberg does, that “...the revelation of his (Noah's) drunkenness, which brings him down to the level of a Lot or a Ben-hadad, comes as a surprise” or that “Job's portrait ... looks so categorical as to leave no room for the subsequent emergence of the bold inquirer into God's ways.”²⁵

It is intended that these points be borne in mind in the study of the narratives about Hezekiah. It would seem likely that the evaluation of him (18:3-6) is reflected in the choice of incidents from his life which has been made, the way in which his devotion to YHWH is rewarded and his reactions as manifested in his words and actions. At the same time, it must not be assumed that everything that is recorded of Hezekiah will confirm the characterizing epithets ascribed to him. It may be that there is a tension within the plot, which in turn confirms the initial characterization and at the same time reveals a complexity of character.

“In the eyes of YHWH”

Not only is characterization relevant to this study, but point of view is important too, as it helps the reader to understand whose perception of a character is being appreciated and how the depiction of the character is being made.²⁶ The comments in this introductory section clearly belong to the narrator, but it is noteworthy that in v. 3 the phrase “in the eyes of the Lord” (בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה) is employed. Here the perspective belongs to God, although the narrator makes the point. It indicates God's attitude to Hezekiah, which is also the attitude of the narrator, but the point is made

²³ Sternberg, *Poetics*, p. 345.

²⁴ Sternberg, *Poetics*, p. 345.

²⁵ Sternberg, *Poetics*, p. 345.

in a more emphatic way by changing the point of view from narrator to God. It also means that YHWH is introduced into the story at a very early stage.

The phrase **בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה** occurs as part of the regnal formula in most instances with both northern and southern kings. When it occurs in respect of Israelite kings, they have always done evil in YHWH's sight. With the Judean kings, the picture is a mixed one; some do what is right and some act wickedly. There are seven Judahite kings apart from Hezekiah who are said to have done what is right in the eyes of the Lord: Asa (1 Kgs. 15:11), Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs. 22: 43-44), Jehoash (2 Kgs. 12:3), Amaziah (2 Kgs. 14:3), Azariah (2 Kgs. 15:3), Jotham (2 Kgs. 15:34) and Josiah (2 Kgs. 22:2). Some of these are compared with David, as Hezekiah is, but not always favourably. Thus, although Amaziah did what was right in the sight of YHWH, his deeds were "yet not like David his father" (2 Kgs. 14:3). Only Asa, Hezekiah, and Josiah do what is right in the eyes of YHWH and are compared favourably with their ancestor, King David. The statements in Hebrew for these three kings are as follows:

Asa **וַיַּעַשׂ אָסָא הַיִּשָּׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה כְּדָוִד אָבִיו**

Hezekiah **וַיַּעַשׂ הַיִּשָּׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה דָּוִד אָבִיו**

Josiah **וַיַּעַשׂ הַיִּשָּׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וַיֵּלֶךְ בְּכָל-דֶּרֶךְ דָּוִד אָבִיו**

Comparing the three statements, it is evident that there is greater emphasis on the achievements of Hezekiah and Josiah. Asa did what was right "as David his father had done" (1 Kgs. 15:11), but, it should be noted, he is also one of the kings who failed to remove the **בְּמוֹת**.²⁷ On the other hand, Hezekiah acted "according to *all* that David his father had done" (18:3) and Josiah "walked in *all* the way of David his father" (22:2). Although at

²⁶ See Berlin, *Poetics*, p. 43.

²⁷ On **בְּמוֹת** see n. 36 below.

first sight the evaluations, which have been made of various kings, may seem somewhat stereotypical, there are in fact some very distinct differences which are important in determining how a particular character is being depicted.

“All that David his father had done”

There appears to be little discussion in the secondary literature on the precise meaning of the clause, “according to all that David his father had done.” Hull considers the fact that comparisons, some positive and some negative, are made between David and seven kings in total: Solomon, Abijam, Asa, Amaziah, Ahaz, Hezekiah, and Josiah. Solomon in his first evaluation and Josiah are said to have walked (הלך) as David did.²⁸ It is also stated that Solomon’s and Abijam’s hearts were not wholly true to YHWH as was David’s.²⁹ With all the other kings who are compared with David the verb עָשָׂה is used. Hull notes that it is also during the reigns of these kings (Asa, Amaziah and Ahaz) that Judah is invaded by Israel. Hezekiah, he admits is an exception to the last point, but he notes that a report of the fall of the northern kingdom (18:9-12) is found among the Hezekiah narratives. In his comments on v. 8, Hull states that “The parallel between David and Hezekiah in the military and foreign affairs sphere affirms what was suggested above in the analysis of verse 3. An important aspect of the comparison of Hezekiah’s actions with David is the success both had in foreign affairs, success based on their relationship with YHWH.”³⁰ David, Hull argues, is better known as a military leader and a success in foreign affairs than as a cult reformer. “While the comparison with David might be based on a similarity between Hezekiah and David regarding their *relationship* to YHWH, it is not likely that it is based only on the specific cultic actions of 18:4. What we *have* found are a number of parallels between specific military successes which is based

²⁸ 1 Kgs 3:3; 2 Kgs 22:2.

²⁹ 1 Kgs 11:4; 15:3.

³⁰ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 206.

on the relationship which both kings have with YHWH.”³¹

An interesting sidelight on the possible meaning of “all that David his father had done” is found in Moshe Weinfeld’s *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School*, where he suggests that the phrase refers to remissive acts performed by the monarch.³² While Hull’s and Weinfeld’s suggestions are both interesting, the significance of the words, “according to all that David his father had done” is probably to be taken in a broader sense. When it is stated that YHWH will give a lamp to Abijam, “because David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD” (1 Kgs. 15:5) the remainder of the verse reads, “and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.” The basis of comparison on the strength of this verse would appear to be obedience to the commands of YHWH. Doing what is right is closely associated with keeping YHWH’s commandments in several

³¹ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 207 (author’s italics).

³² In discussing whether Deuteronomy reflects the typology of a law-code or a treaty, Weinfeld considers the nature of the legislative reforms which are attributed to Moses. He compares them with the *mišarum* acts which he believes lie behind the Old Babylonian codes. The introduction of such reforms, is, according to Moshe Weinfeld (*Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* [Oxford: OUP, 1972] p. 153) supported by 2 Sam. 8:15-18 where a state document tells of the association between David’s enthronement and the statement that “David administered justice and equity

(עֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה) to all his people” (2 Sam. 8:15). He sees this as analogous to the practice of Babylonian kings who performed remissive acts shortly after their enthronement. Thus, according to Weinfeld, the kings of Judah who did right in the eyes of YHWH “as their father David did” were those who performed similar remissive acts. With respect to Hezekiah, Weinfeld (*Deuteronomy*, p. 155) finds biblical evidence for this opinion in Isa. 9:6(7), which he understands to refer to a newly crowned king (whom he takes to be Hezekiah), who will uphold David’s kingdom with justice and righteousness (מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה).

For Weinfeld (*Deuteronomy*, p. 154, n. 3), the fact that some kings did what was right in YHWH’s sight, yet failed to remove the בְּמוֹת and that others such as Jehoash and Amaziah, who did remove syncretistic elements from the cult, but failed to measure up to the degree of righteousness of their ancestor, suggests that it was not the centralization and purification of the cult which gave rise to some kings being favourably compared with David. Eynikel (*Josiah*, p. 36, n. 13) in critiquing Weinfeld argues that these inconsistencies are due to different redactors, some of whom favoured centralization of the cult, and others who paid more attention to the purification of the cult. However, the number of redactions of the Deuteronomic History is a highly debatable issue, and in any case, the perspective of the present study is that of the final form, so Weinfeld’s explanation need not be disregarded on redactional grounds. However, Weinfeld’s explanation does not find direct correspondence within the section currently under examination.

texts in Deuteronomy. See Deut. 6:17-18, 12:28, 13:19(18). The same is true of the following texts in Kings, which also mention that David did what is right: 1 Kgs. 11:38, 14:8. This is precisely what is found in 2 Kgs. 18:6. Cultic reforms, foreign victories and remissive acts may all be examples of actions that David performed and which may have been emulated by Hezekiah, but they may all be seen to be manifestations of obedience to the commandments of YHWH. This would seem to be the significance of doing what is right in the eyes of YHWH. Thus, Hezekiah is depicted as a Davidic king in a spiritual as well as a genetic sense.

The David theme will be further investigated later in the study in the exegesis of 2 Kgs. 19:34 and 20:6, but from the comparison made in the present section it is clear that this is an important element in the characterization of Hezekiah and that he is portrayed in a very positive light because of this. Hezekiah may be depicted as performing various kinds of actions (including foreign victories and cultic reforms, and possibly acts of justice and righteousness), any or all of which it may be argued are typical of David, but the main point is that Hezekiah is portrayed as acting in obedience to YHWH like his ancestor, David. He is seen as pleasing to YHWH.³³

Reforms (18: 4)

There are various questions that might be asked regarding 2 Kgs. 18:4 including the historicity or otherwise of the events mentioned in this verse,³⁴ and the possible political and social implications of such a

³³ L. Alonso-Schökel ("רָצָה", *TDOT*, VI, pp. 465-471 [470]) argues that "Since we are dealing with a stereotyped cliché or an idiomatic formula, and since 'eye' does not have the same connotations as in our languages, the proper translation should be: 'what pleases God,' 'what God (dis)approves.'"

³⁴ The evaluation by historians of the reforms said to have been undertaken by Hezekiah varies considerably. For example, whereas Jonathan Rosenbaum ("Hezekiah's Reform and the Deuteronomistic Tradition", *HTR* 72 [1979], pp. 23-43[35]) argues for "separate and significant reforms" undertaken by Hezekiah and Josiah, Nadav Na'aman ("The Debated Historicity of Hezekiah's Reform in the Light of Historical and Archaeological Research", *ZAW* 107 [1995], pp. 179-195 [193-194]) believes that 2 Kgs. 18:4, 22 were composed by the Deuteronomistic historian, whose only written source was a note regarding the removal of the bronze serpent. In his view, there is no unequivocal

reformation.³⁵ However, the text in its canonical shape is of primary concern in the present study. Yet, even when working on the basis of the final text, the meaning of this verse is still open to debate; this is the case, because the meaning of *בָּמֹת*, for example, is uncertain,³⁶ and even the meaning of the verb *סִוֵּר* in this context has been queried.³⁷

archaeological evidence to support the biblical record of a reform in the days of Hezekiah or even Josiah. Cf. H.-D. Hoffmann, *Reform und Reformen: Untersuchungen zu einem Grundthema der deuteronomistischen Geschichtsschreibung* (ATANT, 66; Zurich, Theologischer Verlag, 1980), p. 155. More recently, Kristin A. Swanson (*Hezekiah's Reform and the Bronze Serpent*, [unpublished PhD thesis.; Vanderbilt University, 1999] abstract) has also argued against the historicity of Hezekiah's reforms on the grounds of the Deuteronomistic context of 2 Kgs. 18:4 and the lack of archaeological evidence. She believes that "The Deuteronomistic Historian used the terms high place, pillar, and Asherah in a polemical manner to condemn certain worship practices as non-Yahwistic."

³⁵ Rosenbaum ("Reform", p. 37) considers that the Assyrians imposed worship of their own deities upon their vassals, and point to Ahaz's adoption of an Assyrian altar as evidence of this (2 Kgs. 16:10-18). Thus, Hezekiah's reforms might be seen as rebellion against Assyria. See also Martin Noth, *The History of Israel* (London: SCM, 2nd edn, 1960) p. 266, John Bright, *A History of Israel* (London: SCM, 3rd edn, 1981), p. 282, and Siegfried Herrmann, *A History of Israel in Old Testament Times* (London: SCM, 2nd edn, 1981), p. 257. (Cogan and Tadmor [*II Kings*, p. 219], however, argue that the Assyro-Babylonian evidence does not support such a view, and that the Assyrians did not interfere with local cults.)

Oded Borowski ("Hezekiah's Reforms and the Revolt against Assyria", *BA* 58 [1995], pp. 148-155) and Lowell K. Handy ("Hezekiah's Unlikely Reforms", *ZAW* 100 [1988], pp. 111-115) also see a connection between the reforms and the revolt against Assyria, but in different ways. Borowski, sees the reforms as "well planned and not the result of impulsive action"; they were "most likely part of Hezekiah's grand scheme which included preparations for the revolt against Assyria to regain independence. Creating a new order through reforms placed Hezekiah in total control of the economy, the food supplies, and the other materials necessary for the upcoming revolt" (p. 148). Handy, however, asserts that it is unlikely that Hezekiah undertook great religious reforms. His actions were more likely those of a ruler whose nation is in the process of being conquered. Thus, the closure of sanctuaries outside of Jerusalem would mean that cultic paraphernalia, especially if valuable, was brought to Jerusalem and could be used as tribute in a last resort. It also kept the items from falling into Assyrian hands, who could have used them for propaganda purposes.

³⁶ The word is often translated as "high places", but its meaning is something of an enigma. See Mervyn D. Fowler, "The Israelite *bāmā*: A Question of Interpretation", *ZAW* 94 (1982), pp. 203-213 for a useful summary of the multifarious suggestions that have been propounded. In the present study, English translations have been deliberately avoided, because of the uncertainty as to the word's meaning. See also Janice E. Catron, "Temple and *bāmāh*: Some Considerations", in Steven W. Holloway and Lowell K. Handy (eds.), *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström* (JSOTSup, 190; Sheffield: SAP, 1995), pp. 150-165, and the articles by W. Boyd Barrick: "High Place", *ABD*, III, pp. 196-200; "Removal", pp. 257-259; "On the Meaning of

בָּמֹת and *בְּתֵי-בָמֹת* and the Composition of the Kings History", *JBL* 115 (1996), pp. 621-642.

³⁷ Richard H. Lowery, (*The Reforming Kings: Cult and Society in First Temple Judah* [JSOTSup, 120; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991], p. 159) indicates that *סִוֵּר* is often used metaphorically, often in a negative sense, suggesting a change of course, politically, morally, or legally. In particular, he examines the four cases in Kings, where the

As the text now stands, it seems that the verbs, which follow the first clause, are intended to complement the first verb. The construction is that of waw followed by the perfect. The actions of breaking the pillars, cutting down the Asherah, and breaking the bronze serpent are actions repeated in the same time scale as, or synonymous with the initial action. They define Hezekiah's acts against idolatrous worship.³⁸ This verse apparently illustrates and defines the act of "doing right" in v. 3. Brueggemann draws attention to the vigorous nature of the verbs and comments that "Hezekiah is an assertive reformer of whom the narrator completely approves."³⁹ The concentration of the four verbs at the beginning of the verse also suggests the single-minded purposefulness of activity in the eyes of the narrator.⁴⁰ The positive statement

הוא הֵסִיר אֶת־הַבְּמוֹת is found with the emphasis on Hezekiah as personally responsible for the reforms. As Barrick notes, "The independent personal pronoun, an otherwise gratuitous embellishment, emphasizes that it was this king who, unlike all his predecessors, at last put an end to these sanctuaries."⁴¹ These grammatical points serve to emphasize the role of Hezekiah and the single-minded and decisive way in

causative of סִר is used to describe a cult purge. These are the removal by Asa of idols made by his ancestors (1 Kgs. 15:12), the removal of the Baal pillar by Jehoram (2 Kgs. 3:2), and the destruction of Samaria's houses of בְּמוֹת by Josiah (2 Kgs. 23:19), as well as the present text under consideration. These purges suggest a physical removal, but Lowery (p. 160) asks, "How is a sacred site removed?" Therefore, Lowery suggests that the word בְּמוֹת must be a synonym for altars, if physical removal is envisaged. However, Lowery (*Reforming Kings*, p.160) argues that the action could refer to a decommissioning of sanctuaries as royal sanctuaries; this suggests that they may have been closed down rather than destroyed. However, 2 Kgs. 21:3a reads, "For he (Manasseh) rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed." The use of the verb אָבַד in the piel (to cause to perish, destroy, kill) in 2 Kgs. 21:3 would suggest that something more physical than decommissioning was undertaken. Manasseh is said to have built בְּמוֹת, suggesting some form of physical destruction or removal on Hezekiah's part. It might be argued that 2 Kgs. 21:3 is from a different redactor, but from a final form viewpoint, it would seem that the בְּמוֹת, whatever they were, were destroyed.

³⁸ J.C.L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar - Syntax* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p. 103; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), pp. 131-132.

³⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (SHBC, 8; Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys Publishing, 2000), p. 491.

⁴⁰ Cf. Alter, *Narrative*, p. 80.

which he acted. The narrator is seen to be portraying Hezekiah as a character positively devoted to YHWH.

It seems likely that Hezekiah's reforms are portrayed as conforming to the admonitions found in Deut. 7:5: "But thus shall you deal with them: you shall break down their altars (מִזְבְּחֵיהֶם), and dash in pieces their pillars (מַצְבֵּתָם), and hew down their Asherim (אֲשֵׁירֵיהֶם), and burn their graven images with fire", and in Deut. 12:3: "You shall tear down their altars (מִזְבְּחֵיהֶם), and dash in pieces their pillars (מַצְבֵּתָם), and burn their Asherim (אֲשֵׁירֵיהֶם) with fire; you shall hew down their graven images of their gods, and destroy their name out of that place." Altars (מִזְבֵּחַת) are not mentioned in 2 Kgs. 18:4, but it is interesting that when the Rabshakeh refers to Hezekiah's reforming action he speaks of both בָּמוֹת and altars being removed (18:22). According to Na'aman the terms מִזְבֵּחַת and בָּמוֹת are interchangeable "due to the fact that the altar was the major element in all non-temple cult places."⁴² Again a major problem lies in knowing how to define בָּמוֹת. The command to "dash in pieces (Piel of שָׁבַר) their pillars (מַצְבֵּבוֹת)" is fulfilled using the same terminology in all three passages. The Asherah⁴³ (2 Kgs. 18:4) or Asherim (Deut. 7:5; 12:3) are then mentioned, although the verbs governing the noun differ in each passage. The graven image (פֶּסֶל) of the Deuteronomy passages is replaced by the bronze serpent (נָחָשׁ הַנְּחֻשֶׁת) in 2 Kgs. 18:4. The serpent appears to be regarded as an image, as offerings were made to it; the image has become an object of worship alongside of, or in place of, YHWH.⁴⁴ This is the only instance of a reference to the story of Numb. 21:8-9 in the rest of the Old Testament. Although originally said to have

⁴¹ Barrick, "Removal", p. 258. Cf. Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 125.

⁴² Na'aman, "Historicity", p. 181. Cf. Lowery, *Reforming Kings*, p. 160.

⁴³ One Hebrew manuscript reads הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת and appears to be followed by some ancient versions. See *BHS* ad loc.

⁴⁴ Na'aman, "Historicity", pp. 181-182.

been made by Moses, the serpent was apparently being used in a way that would have been opprobrious to Moses. Thus, as O'Kane puts it, "...Hezekiah's action in destroying it shows faithfulness to the authentic spirit of Moses."⁴⁵

It is in the context of the evaluation of Solomon doing what is evil in the sight of YHWH that it is stated that he built a **בְּמֹת** for Chemosh and for Molech on the mountain east of Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 11:7). Furthermore, the cultic objects (apart from the bronze serpent), which Hezekiah destroyed are mentioned as being used in the early days of the monarchy in Judah after the division of the kingdom. During the reign of Rehoboam, it states, "For they also built for themselves high places (**בְּמֹת**), and pillars (**מִצְבֹּת**), and Asherim (**אֲשֵׁרִים**) on every high hill and under every green tree" (1 Kgs. 14:23). Again, the preceding verse states that "Judah did what was evil in the sight of the LORD ..." The contents of v. 23 appear to define what was regarded as evil. This suggests that the removal of such paraphernalia would be viewed with approval by YHWH.

In many of the other references to the **בְּמֹת** in the Books of Kings, a formula is apparent which is virtually identical in each case (1 Kgs. 22:44; 2 Kgs. 12:4; 14:4; 15:4; 15:35a). Thus, five Judean kings, Jehoshaphat, Jehoash, Amaziah, Azariah and Jotham are referred to favourably, yet were considered lacking as regards the **בְּמֹת**.⁴⁶ With the exception of 1

⁴⁵ Martin O'Kane, "Isaiah: a Prophet in the Footsteps of Moses", *JSOT* 69 (1996), pp. 25-51 (37).

⁴⁶ Why these kings should be accorded such favour when they failed to remove the **בְּמֹת** is debatable. Provan (*Hezekiah and the Books of Kings*, p. 62) argues that the writer does "not consider the toleration of the **בְּמֹת** sufficient reason to condemn a king, whereas he did consider participation in Jeroboam's sin(s), and/or Baal-worship, sufficient reason for so doing." The reason for this, according to Provan (*Hezekiah and the Books of Kings*, pp. 63-64), lies in the perception of the writer that worship at the **בְּמֹת** was different from the worship of Baal or participation in the sins of Jeroboam. Thus, "... the five kings under discussion were regarded by the author as faithful Yahwists, whose only fault was that they sanctioned such Yahweh-worship at the provincial sanctuaries. For this reason, these kings were distinguished from other northern and southern monarchs, who were regarded as having sanctioned idolatry." These southern kings, who are

Kgs. 22:44, which has אֶךְ instead of כִּי these verses read thus:

כִּי הַבָּמוֹת לֹא־סֻרוּ עוֹד הָעָם מִזִּבְחִים וּמִקְטָרִים בַּבָּמוֹת
 (“Nevertheless the high places were not removed; the people still sacrificed and burned incense on the high places”). There is also a statement in 1 Kgs. 15:14, regarding Asa's reign, that the בָּמוֹת were not removed (וְהַבָּמוֹת לֹא־סֻרוּ). Barrick suggests that the change from וְ to כִּי at the beginning of these statements is part of a progression which depicts a worsening situation. He argues that the nadir is reached with Ahaz who actively burned incense and sacrificed on/in the בָּמוֹת (2 Kgs. 16:4).⁴⁷ Whether or not the slight change in the Hebrew is sufficient to support such a thesis, it is very clear that the statement in 2 Kgs. 18:4 is a striking contrast to the several references to kings who failed to remove the בָּמוֹת. Thus, Hezekiah is placed on a higher level of obedience to YHWH than previous Judean kings.

On the other hand, it need not be assumed that the high evaluation afforded to Hezekiah in Kings is solely on the basis of the reforms recorded in v. 4.⁴⁸ This impression is given by some scholars; for example, Anderson states, “In II Kings 18, the Deuteronomistic editor gives unqualified approval to his (Hezekiah's) reign ... This tribute, of course, was based on the Deuteronomic premise that true worship of

otherwise praised, are deemed to be at fault, not for allowing idolatrous worship, but for allowing worship of YHWH in the wrong places due to the concern for the centralization of such worship. The rest of 18:4, however, would suggest that בָּמוֹת are associated with idolatry, since the verse continues by mentioning the destruction of pillars, Asherah, and the bronze serpent, Nehushtan, to which incense had been burned. Indeed, Catron (“Temple and *bāmāh*”, pp. 154-155) suggests that בָּמוֹת could be cultic buildings and that they might contain objects such as pillars (מַצֵּבֹת) and Asherim (אֲשֵׁרִים). Compare 1 Kgs. 14:23; 2 Chron. 14:2; Ezek. 6:3-4. Provan (*Hezekiah and the Books of Kings*, p. 86) argues, “...it must be assumed that the judgement formulae for both Ahaz and Hezekiah have been reworked by a later editor, and their original orientation obscured.” Again, the uncertainty of the meaning of בָּמוֹת is problematic. Possibly, the worship at the בָּמוֹת was sometimes idolatrous or syncretistic, but had become so ingrained in the culture that it was hard even for a monarch to remove it.

⁴⁷ Barrick, “Removal”, p. 258.

⁴⁸ See Gerald E. Gerbrandt, *Kingship According to the Deuteronomistic History* (SBLDS,

Yahweh must be centralized in Jerusalem.”⁴⁹ It is curious that only one verse out of the three chapters allotted to Hezekiah (and two further oblique references in 2 Kgs. 18:16, 22)⁵⁰ is allocated to these reforms in contrast to the amount of space devoted to the topic in Chronicles. This also contrasts within Kings with the space given to the reforms of King Josiah. Some source critics have asserted that it was because the Deuteronomist was seeking to make a precedent for the reforms of Josiah, and thus this verse was a summative reading back of the latter’s reform.⁵¹ However, it seems more likely that the main purpose of the Hezekiah narratives was to illustrate the trust of Hezekiah in YHWH, whereas in the narratives concerning Josiah it was his reforms that were of prime importance. As will be seen below, both kings are portrayed as incomparable, but for quite different reasons.⁵² The notice regarding Hezekiah’s reforms is used to demonstrate that his actions were “right in the eyes of the LORD” (18:3), but that is not what makes Hezekiah outstanding in the Deuteronomist’s eyes. As Gerbrandt argues, “... the reform may not have been the basis of the Deuteronomist’s view. Rather the basis of the Deuteronomist’s view of Hezekiah is probably to be found in the description of those events in Hezekiah’s reign which the Deuteronomist chose to focus upon.”⁵³ This seems to be confirmed by the mention of the term *בְּיָמָיו* in 18:5 and its apparent use as a *leitmotif* in the narratives that follow.⁵⁴ The evaluation of Hezekiah, as will be seen below, is evidenced by the depiction of his character and actions in the incidents following. The mention of the victories over the Philistines (v.8) is also extremely concise, because they too are not the main concern of the

87; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), pp. 75-76.

⁴⁹ Bernhard W. Anderson, *The Living World of the Old Testament* (Harlow: Longman, 4th edn, 1991), p. 341. Quoted by Gerbrandt, *Kingship*, p. 75.

⁵⁰ The reference in 2 Kgs 18:16 indicates that the gold Hezekiah stripped from the temple doors had previously been applied at his command. Cf. 2 Chron. 29:3. In 2 Kgs 18:22 it is through the speech of the Rabshakeh that we learn of Hezekiah’s centralization of the cult.

⁵¹ See Rosenbaum, “Reform”, p. 35, H.H. Rowley, “Hezekiah’s Reform and Rebellion”, *BJRL* 44 (1961), pp. 395-431 (p. 425 n. 1) and Na’aman (“Historicity”, p. 179), who cites further references.

⁵² On the incomparability formula see below on pp. 44-46.

⁵³ Gerbrandt, *Kingship*, p. 76.

Deuteronomist. The short summaries found in v. 4 and v. 8 enhance and emphasize the positive aspects of Hezekiah's character, but they are not intended to be central features in the narratives.

It would seem that this brief summary of reforms (v.4) is used as an example of Hezekiah's complete conformity to the ideals of the Deuteronomist, but is not necessarily the only or main reason for the positive evaluation of Hezekiah. The king has not only acted like his ancestor David, as several of the Judahite kings had, he has even eliminated the **בָּמֹת**, whatever they may be. The destruction of the religious paraphernalia exemplifies Hezekiah's obedience to YHWH in the narrator's eyes. His exalted position may be further underlined by his destruction of the serpent, although it was said to have been made by Moses.

18:5-6

The accolade, which is accorded to Hezekiah in vv. 5-6, is quite exceptional, the word order at the very beginning of v. 5 being calculated to emphasize Hezekiah's confidence in his God:

בְּטַח בִּיהוָה אֱלֹהֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל (In YHWH, the God of Israel, he trusted ... [literal translation]). The statement of incomparability in v. 5 is also clear evidence that the theme of faith is important: "so that there was none like him among all the kings of Judah after him, nor among those who were before him." This summary statement of Hezekiah's faith is significantly placed in the opening section of the narratives and sets the theme which, it is hoped to show, the subsequent pericopes will illustrate. According to the narrator, it was in the area of faith that Hezekiah shone.

⁵⁴ See on pp. 40-43 for further discussion on **בְּטַח**.

The verb בָּטַח

The verb בָּטַח appears nine times altogether in 2 Kgs. 18-19.⁵⁵ Only the instance of 2 Kgs. 18:5 is not paralleled in the accounts found in Isa. 36-39. Although statistics on their own may be misleading, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that בָּטַח is used as a *leitmotif* in these narratives. Admittedly, this verb is not found in ch. 20. However, this study will endeavour to show that there are strong connections between chs. 18-19 and ch. 20. The formulae (בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם in 20:1 and בָּעֵת הַהִיא in 20:12) which connect the two parts of ch. 20 with chs. 18-19 would suggest that we might expect to find narratives, which are parallel in some way with the long narrative of 18:13-19:37, and it is intended to show that this includes indications of the theme of faith, even though there is no overt mention of the verb בָּטַח in ch. 20.

The distribution of the root in the OT is interesting. The concentration of occurrences of בָּטַח in 2 Kgs. 18-19 is a notable contrast with the rest of the Deuteronomistic History, where the verb only occurs in Deut. 28:52, and Judg. 9:26; 18:7, 10, 27; 20:36, the references in Judges 18 being participles used in an adjectival sense. In none of these references is YHWH the object of trust. The statement that Hezekiah trusted in YHWH may, therefore, be seen to be somewhat unusual against the background of the Deuteronomistic History. The verb is not found at all in Genesis to Numbers, nor in the books of Samuel, thus it is never used of such heroes of faith as Abraham, Moses or David.⁵⁶ (However, הֵאֱמַן is used of Abraham's relationship with YHWH in Gen. 15:6 and the same word is used by Moses in Ex. 4:1, 5, 8 (twice), 9, 31. Moses himself is described as being faithful [נֶאֱמַן] in all God's house in Num. 12:7.) On the other

⁵⁵ 2 Kgs. 18:5, 19, 20, 21(twice), 22, 24, 30; 19:10. The noun בְּטָחוֹן (confidence) is also found in 2 Kgs. 18:19, thus the root is found ten times in total in 2 Kgs. 18-19.

⁵⁶ Moberly, "בָּטַח", p. 648.

hand, the root is particularly common in the book of Psalms.⁵⁷ The book of Isaiah contains twenty-six occurrences of the root. The distribution of the root may be to do with the genre of literature in which it tends to be used. Gerstenberger states that “The verb occurs most often in the OT in prayer and song formulae: two-fifths of all texts are in the Psalter; moreover, outside Psa, many more texts belong to worship genres (cf. the prayer in Isa 12:2; the song in Isa 26:4) or mirror their themes (cf. the Dtr ‘discourses’ in Jer. 7:4ff.; 2 Kgs. 18:5ff.).”⁵⁸ It may also be the case that, while **אָמַן** appears to be synonymous with the hiphil of **אָמַן**, there may be differences of emphasis between them.⁵⁹

Detailed discussion of the other references to **אָמַן** in 2 Kgs: 18-19 and Isa. 36-37 will be reserved until later, as the use of **אָמַן** in the Hezekiah narratives will be discussed in the main part of this thesis, which offers an exegesis of these passages. Similarly, the references in the rest of the book of Isaiah will be examined in more detail in a later chapter on the theme of faith in Isaiah and the relationship of chs. 36-39 to the rest of the book.⁶⁰ Discussion of the verb at this stage will, therefore, concentrate on its use in other books.

There are many exhortations to trust in YHWH, and declarations of such confidence, but **אָמַן** is frequently used in the OT of people who trust in that which is unreliable. Sometimes these negative and positive aspects are contrasted in the same passage. Objects of false security include wealth (Ps. 49:6-7[5-6], 52:9[7]; Prov. 11:28), fortifications (Deut. 28:52; Jer. 5:17), beauty (Ezek. 16:15), one’s own righteousness (Ezek. 33:13), idols (Ps. 115:8; 135:18), and images (Isa. 42:17; Hab. 2:18). Even the temple in Jerusalem can prove to give false security. Jeremiah warns against trusting in deceptive words: “This is the temple of the LORD, the

⁵⁷ In the Book of Psalms, the root occurs 52 times, 44 of these being the qal of **אָמַן**.

⁵⁸ Gerstenberger, “**אָמַן**”, p. 228.

⁵⁹ See Weiser, “Faith”, pp. 191-192.

⁶⁰ See ch. 6.

temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD” (Jer. 7:4; cf. Jer. 7:8, 14; 13:25; 28:15; 29:31). Gerstenberger comments that the temple sermon (Jer. 7:3-15) shows “...how even confidence in Yahweh can be falsified, if not linked to a genuine, direct obedience.”⁶¹ Various people and places are depicted as being unreliable. Thus, Amos inveighs against those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria (Amos 6:1). Israel became ashamed of trusting in Bethel (Jer. 48:13). Taking refuge in YHWH is said to be better than trusting in princes, who are described as being only mortal in Ps. 118:8-9; cf. Ps. 146:3. This understanding may be reflected in the Rabshakeh’s speech in 2 Kgs. 18:20-21, where he insinuates that Hezekiah is relying on Egypt and its pharaoh. Weapons are also seen to be unreliable objects of trust in comparison to God’s salvation in Ps. 44:7-8(6-7).

The blessing of trusting in YHWH is expressed in several places in the OT, such as Ps. 40:5(4), 84:13(12), Prov. 16:20 and Jer. 17:7. Exhortations to trust in YHWH are also frequent. They are found in the book of Proverbs, for example, in contrast to relying on one’s own insight (Prov. 3:5; cf. 28:26) and in several of the psalms such as Ps. 4:6(5); 62:9(8); 115:9-11. Trusting in YHWH is furthermore contrasted with the worship of false gods in Ps. 31:7(6); cf. Ps. 40:5(4).

Moberly has rightly drawn attention to the connection between trust in YHWH and deliverance in the Psalms.⁶² Several verbs are found whose meaning is “deliver”. Psalm 22 may serve as a good example. The verb **בָּטַח** is found three times in Ps. 22:5-6(4-5): “In thee our fathers trusted (**בָּטַח**); they trusted (**בָּטַח**), and thou didst deliver (**פָּלַט**) them. To thee they cried and were saved (**מָלַט**); in thee they trusted (**בָּטַח**), and were not disappointed.” **בָּטַח** occurs again in v. 10(9) in the hiphil, following the occurrence of the hiphil of the verb **נָצַל** in v. 9(8). ““He committed his

⁶¹ Gerstenberger, “בָּטַח”, p. 229.

cause to the LORD; let him deliver (פָּלַט) him, let him rescue (נָצַל) him, for he delights in him!’ Yet thou art he who took me from the womb; thou didst keep me safe (בָּטַח) upon my mother’s breasts.” Compare Ps. 25:1-2; 28:7; 31:15-16(14-15) where בָּטַח in v. 15(14) precedes the hiphil of נָצַל in v. 16 (15). Compare also Ps. 33:19, 21; 56: 12-14(11-13); 91:2-3; 143:8-9. Trust in God, who is “my salvation” (יְשׁוּעָה) and “my deliverance” (יְשׁוּעָה) is exhorted (Ps. 62:7-9[6-8]) in contrast to placing confidence in extortion (Ps. 62:11[10]). This connection is similarly found in the Hezekiah narratives, where the verb נָצַל occurs some seven times. However, בָּטַח is not only used of Hezekiah; it is skilfully worked by the author into the speeches of the Rabshakeh, the Assyrian envoy. “And the irony of this complete misunderstanding of the dynamics of Yahweh’s relationship with Israel is to be savoured and appreciated,”⁶³ as Moberly has commented. It makes for a fascinating exploration of the theme of faith; the contrast between the Assyrian and his concept of his deities and their relationship with humankind work as a foil to emphasize the faithful character of Hezekiah and the gracious acts of YHWH.

Olley has surveyed the use of the verb בָּטַח in the OT synchronically, beginning with the instances in 2 Kgs. 18-19. He concludes, “In all the varied books there is a commonality of context and content.”⁶⁴ Trust in YHWH is synonymous with the worship of one God and precludes the worship of other gods. The context of trusting is often that of an enemy who is threatening and deliverance is being sought. Trusting in anything other than YHWH, whether military strength or weapon, or foreign ally, or place, or own righteousness is seen as folly.

⁶² Moberly, “בָּטַח”, p. 646.

⁶³ Moberly, “בָּטַח”, p. 647.

⁶⁴ Olley, “Trust”, p. 73.

The Incomparability formula

The incomparability formula of 18:5 is one of three such positive formulae found in the Books of Kings, this one being the second. The first is used of Solomon in 1 Kgs 3:12b: "Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you." The third one refers to Josiah: "Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him" (2 Kgs 23:25). Kenik has analyzed these formulae to find components within them that link the material to the whole of the Deuteronomistic History and indicate the theological thrust of the Deuteronomist. She notes the chiastic balance of the two sections of 1 Kgs. 3:12c:

כְּמוֹד לֹא־הָיָה לִפְנֵיךְ וְאַחֲרֶיךָ לֹא־יָקוּם כְּמוֹד.⁶⁵ Solomon is characterized by his wise and intelligent heart. The Hebrew text of 2 Kgs. 18:5b reads thus:

וְאַחֲרָיו לֹא־הָיָה כְּמֹהוּ בְּכָל מַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה וְאֲשֶׁר הָיוּ לִפְנָיו

In this case the chiastic form is not as clear, but there may be an echo of it in the way that the clause begins with וְאַחֲרָיו and ends with לִפְנָיו. Again, the distinguishing characteristic precedes the incomparability formula. Thus, it was the fact that in YHWH, God of Israel, he trusted, which is important and will be the theme of the following narratives. With Josiah, the plan of the formula is a little different, but some similarity is evident. "Before him there was no king like him (וְכְמֹהוּ לֹא־הָיָה לִפְנָיו מֶלֶךְ), who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him (וְאַחֲרָיו לֹא־יָקָם כְּמֹהוּ)" (2 Kgs. 23:25). Comparison of the beginning and the end manifests a similar chiastic arrangement to that of 1 Kgs. 3:12c, but the distinguishing feature of Josiah is enveloped within the

⁶⁵ Helen A. Kenik, *Design for Kingship: The Deuteronomistic Narrative Technique in 1*

formula in this case.

Gerbrandt compares the statements regarding Hezekiah and Josiah, and comments, "The obvious question which these two evaluations raise, however, is whether or not they contain a contradiction."⁶⁶ Gerbrandt details a number of textual emendations that have been proposed for 18:5, but the only one with textual support is the omission of כל (all), following the LXX. This change, however, makes little difference to the question of the compatibility or otherwise of the two statements of incomparability.⁶⁷ One move is to argue that, although they now appear contradictory, the reference to kings who came after Hezekiah was a later addition. Another is to suggest that two sources have been used and that these were left unchanged by the editor. Eynikel argues that a later editor applied the original formula found in 2 Kgs. 18:5 to Josiah, and then raised Josiah above Hezekiah by showing him to follow the Shema (2 Kgs. 23:25).⁶⁸ However, such exigencies are not necessary. Gerbrandt draws attention to the observations of Keil and Fricke. Both have commented on the fact that Hezekiah and Josiah were incomparable in different ways.⁶⁹ More recently, Knoppers has made the same point.⁷⁰ He discusses how the incomparability formulae have been used by various scholars to indicate different redactions of the Books of Kings. The use of the formula in respect of Josiah is seen by some to be the climax of a Josianic edition, but then the phrase "nor did any like him arise after him" has to be treated as a later addition. Partly on the basis of this phrase, Provan argues for a Hezekian redaction after the reign of Hezekiah, but before the reforms of

Kings 3:4-15 (SBLDS, 69; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), p. 170.

⁶⁶ Gerbrandt, *Kingship*, p. 51. See Eynikel, *Josiah*, p. 108 for details of other scholars who have noted a possible contradiction.

⁶⁷ Gerbrandt, *Kingship*, p. 51, n. 22.

⁶⁸ Eynikel, *Josiah*, p. 108.

⁶⁹ Gerbrandt, *Kingship*, p. 53. C.F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 432. Klaus Dietrich Fricke, *Das Zweite Buch von den Königen* (Die Botschaft des Alten Testaments Band 12.2; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1972), p. 335. Cf. M. Rehm, *Das zweite Buch der Könige. Ein Kommentar* (Würzburg, 1982), p. 228.

⁷⁰ Gary N. Knoppers, "'There was None like Him': Incomparability in the Books of Kings", *CBQ* 54 (1992), p. 411-431.

Josiah.⁷¹ However, Knoppers argues, "According to the prevalent way of treating incomparability formulae, each assertion of uniqueness signals a redaction layer. Hence, the claims of Solomon's, Hezekiah's, and Josiah's incomparability should stem from three different hands. Yet virtually all scholars would agree that such a Solomonic edition would be highly implausible."⁷² In contrast, Knoppers' thesis is that "each of these judgments is associated with specific features of a monarch's reign, in which that king is deemed unique or incomparable. Solomon is lauded for unparalleled wisdom and wealth, Hezekiah for unparalleled trust, and Josiah for unparalleled reforms."⁷³ Thus, Knoppers suggests that the three instances of the incomparability formula are not mutually contradictory, but indicate a unity. "The incomparability formulae are one means by which an exilic Deuteronomist highlights the exceptional accomplishments of major figures within his history."⁷⁴ Knoppers' thesis has the advantage of not having to treat certain parts of verses as late additions, when there is no textual support for such.

Yet, even the explanation propounded by Knoppers, Keil, and Fricke may be unnecessary. It is possible that the language used in these verses was a well-known rhetorical device. Botha argues that these verses should "... be seen as hyperbolic qualifiers, part of a scribal convention well-attested in the Ancient Near East."⁷⁵ There is a danger of reading the text in a "wooden" fashion, seeking out contradictions that may never have occurred to the redactor(s) or the earliest readers.

⁷¹ Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings*, p. 153.

⁷² Knoppers, "Incomparability", p. 413. Thus, Eynikel (*Josiah*, p. 108, n. 256), for example, comments on Knoppers' thesis: "I can agree that Solomon falls outside the competition, but there is a real contradiction between Hezekiah and Josiah." However, Eynikel fails to expand on this statement.

⁷³ Knoppers, "Incomparability", p. 413.

⁷⁴ Knoppers, "Incomparability", p. 414. He contends that the portraits of these three kings originated in a pre-exilic edition of the Deuteronomistic History, and are accentuated by an exilic Deuteronomist (p. 413).

⁷⁵ Botha, P.J., "'No King like Him ...': Royal Etiquette according to the Deuteronomistic Historian", in Johannes C. de Moor and Harry F. van Rooy (eds.), *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* (OTS, 44; Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 36-49 (38 n. 8). Cf. Long (*2 Kings*, p. 195), who is cited by Botha.

18:6

In v. 6 there is again a concentration of verbs that suggests the intensity with which Hezekiah devoted himself to YHWH.⁷⁶ His allegiance is stated positively, then negatively and then again positively. The intention is to make it very clear to the reader that Hezekiah is an utterly devoted follower of YHWH.

The Verb דָּבַק

What is involved in trusting in YHWH is clearly expounded in this verse. Hezekiah is said to have held fast (דָּבַק) to YHWH. The literal sense of “cleaving, sticking to” is found in reference to items connected with the body, such as a waistcloth clinging to the loins (Jer. 13:11), a sword cleaving to the hand of a warrior (2 Sam. 23:10),⁷⁷ and the tongue sticking to the roof of the mouth (Job 29:10; Ps. 22:16[15]; 137:6; Lam. 4:4; Ezek. 3:26). It is also used of clods of earth sticking together (Job 38:38) and the joining together of the scales of the crocodile (Job 41:9[17]). Figuratively it is used of close personal relationships. The verb is found four times in the book of Ruth where Ruth is the subject or the subject understood. Thus at the beginning of the story Ruth clings to Naomi, her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:14). She is told to stay close to his servant girls by Boaz (Ruth 2:8; cf. 2:21, 23). It is also used of the bond of marriage in Gen. 2:24, where a man cleaves to his wife. It should be mentioned that the context is not always friendly, however, as דָּבַק is often used in a military sense of close pursuit (Judg. 18:22; 20:43, 45; 1 Sam. 14:22; 31:2; 2 Sam. 1:6; 1 Chron. 10:2). Whether in marriage, the extended family, or military pursuit, there is a sense of “closeness” suggested by the term דָּבַק.

It is, therefore, not surprising that it is used theologically of a close

⁷⁶ Cf. Alter, *Narrative*, p. 80.

⁷⁷ Gerhard Wallis (“דָּבַק”, *TDOT*, III, pp. 79-84 [81]) strangely includes this verse in a group of references where “...dbq is used ... as a technical term for immediate military pursuit”.

relationship between a person and YHWH. The term דָּבַק is found several times in this theological sense in Deuteronomy⁷⁸ (in contrast with בָּטַח which is found only once in Deuteronomy). Wallis notes some of the other terms, which are used in connection with דָּבַק.⁷⁹ Thus in Deut. 13:5(4) verbs which signify the keeping of the law are used alongside דָּבַק as well as certain verbs which speak of a faithful relationship: “You shall walk after the LORD your God (אֲחֲרַי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם תֵּלְכוּ) and fear him, and keep his commandments (וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו תִּשְׁמְרוּ) and obey his voice, and you shall serve him and cleave (תִּדְבַקוּ) to him.” This finds resonances in 2 Kgs. 18:6 where it states that Hezekiah did not turn from following after YHWH (מֵאַחֲרָיו) and kept his commandments (וַיִּשְׁמֹר מִצְוֹתָיו). Again similarities are to be found with Josh. 23:6-8 where Joshua exhorts the people to keep (שָׁמַר) all that is found in the book of the law of Moses, not to turn (סוּר) from it, but to cleave (דָּבַק) to YHWH. Similarity between בָּטַח and דָּבַק is evident when relationship with YHWH is seen to be established “on a wholly concrete decision to serve Yahweh and to reject other gods, i.e., on conscious action, which is the only appropriate response to the wholly practicable demand that man obey the divine law”, as Wallis puts it.⁸⁰

Wallis views the whole of Psalm 63 as a meditation on the spiritual significance of the term.⁸¹ The personal seeking and thirsting after God results in a desire to praise God. It is not an ephemeral passion, for it continues through the watches of the night. The cleaving of the psalmist's soul to YHWH is in reciprocation for, and in response, to the חֶסֶד of YHWH. It is noteworthy that whereas דָּבַק appears to be an appropriate

⁷⁸ The verb דָּבַק in connection with YHWH is found in Deut. 10:20, 11:22, 13:4, 30:20 and the adjective is found in Deut. 4:4.

⁷⁹ Wallis, “דָּבַק”, p. 82.

⁸⁰ Wallis, “דָּבַק”, p. 82.

⁸¹ Wallis, “דָּבַק”, p. 83.

term for human attachment to God, the converse is not so. “Thus the divine counterpart to man’s *dabhaq* is Yahweh’s *chesedh*”, states Wallis.⁸² As *בַּטַח* was seen to be connected with deliverance from enemies, here too is the notion of faithful devotion in the face of those who would seek to destroy the psalmist’s life. It is not surprising then that this term *דָּבַק* should be used of Hezekiah. The king who faces insurmountable odds is characterized as a man of faith and faithfulness; it is because of his closeness to YHWH that he can have the inner strength to face the foe. For, as it is hoped to show, the Hezekiah narratives are far more than a comparison of military resources, or of a warfare of words and propaganda. They concern the triumph of a king whose ultimate weapon is his obedience to YHWH.

There are two further references to *דָּבַק* that should be noted in contrast to the shining example of Hezekiah. The verb is used of King Solomon, not at the beginning, nor at the height of his reign, but sadly near the end. For the object of Solomon’s cleaving was not YHWH, but his foreign wives to whom he clung in love (1 Kgs. 11:2). It was they who “turned away his heart after other gods” (11:4). Jehoram despite putting away (*סִיר*) the pillar of Baal made by his father, “clung (*דָּבַק*) to the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin; he did not depart (*סִיר*) from it” (2 Kgs. 3:3). Auld suggests that 2 Kgs. 3:3 and 18:6 appear to be contrasted deliberately.⁸³

The clauses, which follow in 18:6, explicate the meaning of *דָּבַק* in both a negative and positive way: “he did not depart (*סִיר*) from following him, but kept the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses.” The allegiance of Hezekiah to YHWH is paralleled and emphasized by the negative statement of his not departing (*סִיר*) from after him. Contrast

⁸² Wallis, “*דָּבַק*”, p. 83.

⁸³ A. Graeme Auld, *Kings Without Privilege: David and Moses in the Story of the Bible’s Kings* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), p. 101.

Jehoram who did not depart (סור) from Jeroboam's sin (2 Kgs. 3:3) and the command of Joshua not to depart (סור) from what is written in the book of the law, but to cleave to YHWH (Josh. 23:6-8). He who caused the בְּמוֹת to “depart” (hiphil of סור; 2 Kgs. 18:4) did not depart from YHWH. The use of the same verb may suggest a contrast between devotion to the בְּמוֹת or the gods represented there, and devotion to YHWH. Again, the king's allegiance to YHWH is underlined by his keeping of YHWH's commandments. He is depicted as an obedient king *par excellence*. This is the second of three references to Moses in 18:1-12 (cf. v. 4 and v. 12). Hezekiah is depicted as keeping the laws of Moses in direct contrast to the inhabitants of the northern kingdom, who transgressed all that Moses had commanded (v. 12). Hezekiah is seen as a king who is obedient to the word of YHWH through his prophets. He listens both to Moses and to Isaiah (compare 20:19), and thus he is held up as an example to the people of Judah.⁸⁴

18:7-8

The amazing concatenation of praise for Hezekiah continues with the statement that YHWH was with him and that he succeeded wherever he went. Verse 7a articulates what might be thought of as the “orthodox” theology of the Old Testament. Because Hezekiah is totally faithful and obedient to YHWH, YHWH is with him. And wherever Hezekiah goes, he prospers, since YHWH must be with him. Again the word כָּל is used suggesting that not only did Hezekiah follow his ancestor's example in doing right in every respect (cf. 18:3), but that in every place he went forth, he succeeded. The verb יָצָא is probably used in the military sense of going into battle. The revolt against Assyria is mentioned as the first action of Hezekiah after the general statement regarding his success in

⁸⁴ O'Kane, “Isaiah”, p. 37.

military affairs.⁸⁵ This might be an intimation of the importance of this matter, which may be viewed as the mainspring of the main narrative that follows, beginning at v. 13. It indicates that the rebellion was seen as a success, at least at first.

Verse 8 begins with the pronoun הוּא (cf. v. 4), indicating emphasis,⁸⁶ as well as a break in the narrative; this underlines that indeed it was Hezekiah who smote the Philistines. The Philistines are conquered as far as Gaza, which indicates to the furthest reaches of Hezekiah's kingdom. For, as the southernmost city of the Philistines, it represented the boundary of the ideal kingdom under Solomon (1 Kgs. 5:1, 4[4:21, 24]; 8:65).⁸⁷ The theme of totality again appears in the use of the phrase "from watchtower to fortified city." The only other occurrence of the phrase (מִמִּגְדֵּל נֹצְרִים עַד-עִיר מְבֻצָּר) in the Old Testament is in 2 Kgs. 17:9 where Israel, the northern kingdom, is condemned for the building of בָּמוֹת. "They built for themselves high places at all their towns, from watchtower to fortified city." The phrase suggests completeness, whether it is idolatry as in ch. 17, or despoliation of Philistine territory as here, for it extends from the smallest or least fortified place to the largest city, which in those days would normally be well fortified.

The theological significance of the statements in vv. 7-8 has been perceived by Provan, who sees here further evidence (in addition to the declaration of v.3) that denotes Hezekiah as a monarch of the same ilk as his ancestor, David.⁸⁸ In 18:7 it states that YHWH was with Hezekiah. He is the only Davidic king apart from David of whom this is stated.⁸⁹ Provan also notes that Hezekiah is said to have prospered (hiphil of שָׁכַל)

⁸⁵ This summary may seem to be contradicted by the later report that Hezekiah gave a large quantity of gold and silver to Sennacherib (18:14-16). For discussion of this matter see ch. 2 below.

⁸⁶ Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 126.

⁸⁷ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 205.

⁸⁸ See Provan, *Hezekiah and the Books of Kings*, pp. 116-117.

⁸⁹ Cf. 1 Sam. 16:18; 18:12,14; 2 Sam. 5:10.

in war (18:7), as David did.⁹⁰ Furthermore, only Hezekiah and David are said to have defeated the Philistines.⁹¹ Hezekiah is not the only king to be compared with David, yet in several ways Hezekiah is distinguished as being uniquely like David.

The Fall of Samaria (18:9-12)

This section begins with the word **וַיְהִי**, echoing the beginning of verse one. Hull argues that whereas vv. 1-8 serve as background information, narrative is resumed in v. 9, and that the repeated **וַיְהִי** is a form of resumptive repetition, although he accepts that v. 9 “begins with a background main clause which supplies the necessary information for understanding the foreground narrative.”⁹² However, vv. 9-12 also read as a summary rather than as a detailed narrative. It seems more natural to take vv. 1-12 as background commentary and to see v. 13 as the resumption of narrative. Hull himself seems to view vv. 9-12 in this way later in his thesis, when discussing their setting in the Hezekiah narratives in contrast to the narrative about the fall of Samaria given in ch. 17. “Thus, 18:9-12 functions as *background information* which the narrator supplies to set up the telling of the primary story, Sennacherib's invasion of Hezekiah (sic).”⁹³ An alternative view of the function of the term **וַיְהִי** in v. 9 would be to see it as marking the change of scene from Judah to Israel. However, the frequency of the term makes it difficult to be dogmatic about its meaning.

The account of the conquest of the northern kingdom is much shorter than that provided in ch. 17. Much of the detail of that account is omitted, probably because it is irrelevant to the Judean situation. Cohn states, “It does not mention Hoshea's treachery, imprisonment, and failure to pay tribute. That is all part of the story of the North, while from Judah's

⁹⁰ Cf. 1 Sam. 18:5, 14, 15, and 18:30 where the verb is found in the qal.

⁹¹ Cf. 2 Kgs. 18:8 with 1 Sam. 18:27; 19:8; 2 Sam. 8:1.

⁹² Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 219.

⁹³ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 250 (italics added).

perspective, what matters is the siege and capture, and then the exile.”⁹⁴ He further notes that the theological indictment of 17:7-18 is summarized in 18:12 “in more precise Deuteronomic language” and that, despite the length of harangue of ch. 17, the name of Moses is not mentioned as it is in 18:12.⁹⁵ This is the third mention of his name in 18:1-12; a deliberate contrast seems to be being made between Israel who sinned and Hezekiah who kept the commandments given through Moses (compare 18:6).

Hull analyses v. 12 in some detail, especially the use of the four verbs whose subject is “they”, relating to the Israelites in v. 11. **לֹא-שָׁמְעוּ** is found both at the beginning of the verse and as the first of the pair of verbs which end the verse. As Hull notes, it would seem that “...the basic thesis of the comment is that Israel’s fall is due to a failure to listen to the voice of YHWH.”⁹⁶ This failure to hear God’s voice meant a transgression of God’s covenant, of everything commanded by Moses. Hull contrasts 18:12 with 17:7-41. “The emphasis there is on sinning (**חָטָא**, 17:7), especially cultic sin inspired by the nations. It is true that failure to listen is mentioned (**וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ**, 17:14). But this statement is certainly not the dominant focus of the long commentary.”⁹⁷ Verse 12 is obviously much briefer than the passage in ch. 17, but this focuses attention on the reason given here for the collapse of the northern regime. The emphasis on **שָׁמַע** becomes more significant when one considers the fact that the verb **שָׁמַע** is found sixteen times in 18:13-19:37⁹⁸ and four times in ch.20.⁹⁹ Hull suggests that the fundamental issue is the question of who speaks and whose word is heard, in other words, “... who has the voice of authority.”¹⁰⁰ Statistically, the repetition of the term “hear” (**שָׁמַע**) suggests that in 18:13-19:37 there may be an emphasis of similar

⁹⁴ Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 126.

⁹⁵ Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 126.

⁹⁶ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 252.

⁹⁷ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 252.

⁹⁸ 18:26, 28, 31, 32; 19:1, 4(twice), 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 16(twice), 20, 25.

⁹⁹ 20:5, 12, 13, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 253.

importance to that of “trust” (בְּטַח) and “deliver” (נָצַל). However, these issues are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In the forthcoming chapters it is intended to explore both the notions of trust and authority.

Hobbs suggests two reasons for the inclusion of the notice of the fall of Samaria in the present position: “One, it provided a synchronization of the fall of Samaria with the reign of Hezekiah, and, two, it sets the historical stage for the subsequent events narrated from the reign of Hezekiah.”¹⁰¹ The former point is probably true, but the historical background has already been given in ch. 17. However, there may well be a literary reason for the inclusion of this notice at this point, for, as Hull notes, the similarity in expression between v. 9 and v. 13 gives rise to a tension.¹⁰² Compare “In the fourth year of King Hezekiah ... Shalmaneser king of Assyria came up against (עָלָה...עַל) Samaria and besieged it” (v. 9) with “In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah Sennacherib king of Assyria came up against (עָלָה...עַל) all the fortified cities of Judah and took them” (v. 13). The reader has been told what happened when a previous king of Assyria besieged Samaria earlier in the reign of Hezekiah; the question arises as to what will happen to Jerusalem and its inhabitants now that the present king of Assyria has taken the cities of Judah. Repetition of an account of the fall of Samaria “... lets the reader know what is at stake. Having just been told the high praise of Hezekiah in the introductory comment (18:3-8), the reader might too easily assume the conclusion. Summary comments resolve the tensions in order to get to the bottom line. The repetition of disaster that has happened during this very reign, prepares the reader for the spirit of what is to follow. The invasion will be a *real* crisis. The jarring loses (sic) of 18:13-16 are not quite as unexpected - remember what happened in Samaria - as they would have been if they followed immediately on 18:8. Hence the narrator begins

¹⁰¹ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 247.

¹⁰² Hull, *Hezekiah*, pp. 248-249. Hobbs (*2 Kings*, p. 247) also notes the similarity between v. 9 and v. 13.

building the tension for the invasion of Judah by recapping events in the north.”¹⁰³

Yet there also seems to be a theological purpose in the juxtaposing of the accounts. As Mullen comments, “Within the context of the political notice of the successes of Hezekiah appears a renewed report of the destruction of Israel (18:9-12) that is clearly intended to contrast the actions of Judah under Hezekiah with those of Israel.”¹⁰⁴ The Israelites were carried away, “because they did not obey the voice of the LORD their God but transgressed his covenant, even all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded; they neither listened nor obeyed (literally ‘did’)” (2 Kgs 18:12). This clearly contrasts with, and highlights, the obedience of Hezekiah, who clung to YHWH, departed not from following him, and “kept the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses (2 Kgs. 18:6)”. Thus, the inclusion of vv. 9-12 not only adds an anticipatory tension to the plot, but also further emphasizes the character of Hezekiah by means of contrast. Character is frequently revealed or emphasized by contrast in the Old Testament.¹⁰⁵ Often it is the contrast between two individuals, such as Jacob and Esau, Reuben and Judah, Abigail and Nabal, or Saul and David, whereas here it is a contrast between the king of Judah and the people of Israel.

Conclusions

This introductory section most importantly deals with the characterization of Hezekiah. This is achieved not just by one statement or one method, but also by a combination of several techniques. Thus the comment, or theological evaluation, in v. 3 reveals that his actions were right from the perspective of YHWH and reflected those of his ancestor, David. This is confirmed, and defined, by the intensive list of verbs in v. 4, which indicate the actions of Hezekiah which underline the positive theological

¹⁰³ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 251 (author's italics).

¹⁰⁴ E.T. Mullen, “Crime and Punishment: The Sins of the King and the Despoliation of the Treasuries”, *CBQ* 54 (1992), pp. 231-248 (244).

¹⁰⁵ See Berlin, *Poetics*, pp. 40-41, 136.

verdict of v. 3. The reader is then made aware of something of the inner life of this king. His trust in YHWH, which was unequalled by other kings, is made evident and the verb which may be the chief *leitmotif* of the main narrative (בָּטַח) is introduced. This devotion to YHWH is also further defined in v. 6 by the use of a particularly significant verb, יָרַבֵּק. Hezekiah holds fast to YHWH and is circumspect in his obedience to YHWH's commands. Again, there is the comment of v. 7 that YHWH was with him and that he was accorded success, particularly as regards two foreign nations, the Assyrians and the Philistines. His prospering is regarded as a direct correlation to YHWH's presence with him. As if not all this were enough, the notice of vv. 9-12 provides an interesting contrast between Hezekiah and the people of the northern kingdom. Hezekiah is confirmed as a good king who trusts in YHWH in an exceptional way. The plots of the narratives that follow will be explored to ascertain how the theme of that trust is worked out.

Chapter Two - Exegesis of 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37

Introduction

From 2 Kgs 18:13 onwards, the Kings account of the Hezekiah narratives is paralleled by the Isaianic account with two major differences, and several minor ones. The two major differences are as follows: the notice regarding Hezekiah's contribution of tribute to Sennacherib (2 Kgs 18:14-16) is not found in Isaiah, and the psalm attributed to Hezekiah (Isa. 38:9-20) is missing in Kings. The narrative of 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37 is treated here as a chronological whole. This is not to deny that the writer did not use two or more sources.¹ However, this is done because of the literary approach that is being taken in this study.²

The unit begins with a narrative summary (2 Kgs 18:13-18), which introduces the main actants and sets the scene for the dialogues which follow. The place for the meeting of the Assyrian emissaries and Hezekiah's representatives is specifically mentioned in v. 17, suggesting its importance. The significance and purpose of 18:14-16, and its omission in the book of Isaiah is discussed in detail below. A dialogue between the Rabshakeh and Hezekiah's men follows (18:19-27). In 18:28-35 there is a dialogue (or, more accurately, monologue, since no answer is forthcoming) where the Rabshakeh addresses the Jerusalemites. This is followed by a short notice indicating the people's unresponsiveness to the Rabshakeh at the command of Hezekiah (18:36). 18:37-19:2 is a short narrative summary, where the three representatives of Hezekiah report to their king, and Hezekiah reacts and responds by sending a delegation to Isaiah. There is a kind of dialogue between Isaiah

¹ For a recent discussion of source criticism of 2 Kgs 18:13-19:37 see Gallagher, *Sennacherib's Campaign*, pp. 143-159. Disagreement over the sources is still to be found. For example, Gallagher believes that there are two main sources, A (18:13-16) and B (18:17-19:37), whereas van der Kooij ("Hezekiah", pp. 107-108) accepts that there are three: 18:13-16 (A); 18:17-19:9a, 36-37 (B1); 19:9b-35 (B2).

² The A and B accounts have been read chronologically by several scholars. See the survey found in F.J. Gonçalves, *L'expédition de Sennachérib en Palestine dans la littérature hébraïque ancienne* (EBib; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1986), pp. 122-125. More recently, see Long, *2 Kings*, pp. 223-225; van der Kooij ("Hezekiah", pp. 109-111) reads

and Hezekiah in 19:3-7, but it is conducted at a distance through the intermediaries sent by the king. In 19:8-9a the scene is set for the sending of messengers by Sennacherib to Hezekiah with a message, which seeks to maintain the pressure upon the king (19:9b-13). Again, a short narrative (19:14) describes Hezekiah's reaction to the message; this is followed by his prayer to YHWH (19:15-19). The reply is forthcoming in a series of oracles given by Isaiah the prophet (19:20-34). The narrative ends with a notice about the destruction of the Assyrians and the later demise of Sennacherib himself (19:35-37).

The author/redactor has painted a picture of complete victory for Hezekiah and absolute defeat for Sennacherib, king of the Assyrians. The story moves from Assyrian domination of the major part of Judah (18:13) to the annihilation of the Assyrian army (19:35). The basic plot involves the triumph of God's people over the enemy, but it is the depiction of how that victory is effected which is relevant to the understanding of the concept of faith. Two main features of the narrative emphasize Hezekiah's trust in YHWH. The taunts of the Assyrian against Hezekiah and his God portray that trust in a negative way; the prayer of Hezekiah (37:16-20) depicts it positively.³ There are three messages from Sennacherib. The number of messages may be a literary device used to prolong the tension and dramatize in a greater manner the eventual victory for Hezekiah.⁴ The drama is particularly heightened, because, after the first two messages and the oracle, which Hezekiah receives from Isaiah, the Rabshakeh leaves the scene and it looks as if that may be the end of the matter. However, the pressure on Hezekiah is unrelieved, for Sennacherib sends a letter, the third message, which Hezekiah finds just as

the story as a whole by concentrating on the motif of the withdrawal and return (שוב) of the Assyrian king.

³ Knoppers, "Incomparability", p. 419

⁴ Smelik (*Converting*, pp. 105-106) has drawn attention to two possible analogous passages, 1 Sam. 19:18-21 and 2 Kgs. 1:9-15. These passages have more in common with each other than they do with 2 Kgs 18-19/Isa. 36-37. In both of the passages cited by Smelik, three groups of men are despatched to take a man who is enjoying protection from God. In the first, "the spirit of God" falls on the would-be captors; in the second fire falls on the first two groups of fifty. In neither passage are the men sent with a message, nor is there any mention of a letter. The only connection with the present

threatening as the previous ones from the Rabshakeh just outside the city. At the end of the story, aid comes in the form of the angel of YHWH. The Assyrian troops are wiped out and the threat is averted. As Clements has put it: "Once the outcome is known, then everything points back to show that it is faith in Yahweh alone which has made the deliverance of Jerusalem possible."⁵

18:13

The narrator sets the scene in 18:13. His part in this narrative seems to be a comparatively small one, so much so that Fewell describes it as "disproportionate".⁶ Fewell seems to be judging by modern standards. However, the apparent primacy of dialogue in Old Testament narrations has been noted by several scholars including Alter, who avers, "... third person narration is frequently only a bridge between much larger units of direct speech."⁷ This is clearly the case in this narrative. The two main human characters, Hezekiah and Sennacherib, are named. Hezekiah is mentioned only to set the time of the incident, and he is given his title, as is usually the case when a king's regnal year is being used for dating purposes.⁸ Sennacherib, on the other hand, is described as having attacked and captured all the fortified cities of Judah, other than Jerusalem. He is seen to be the aggressor, the domineering representative of earthly power. There is often a conflict of some type at the beginning of a story, and this narrative is no exception.⁹ In the Old Testament, the world is seen as being in "incessant conflict",¹⁰ whether it is man against God or against his neighbour, or against his relative. The plot may be worked by taking a conflict, which will then be complicated in several ways before the conflict is resolved and the denouement is reached. "The fact that Sennacherib does not return the first time, nor the second, but only at the

narrative is the number three.

⁵ Ronald E. Clements, *Isaiah 1-39* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) p. 282.

⁶ Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat", p. 80.

⁷ Alter, *Narrative*, p. 65. See also Berlin, *Poetics*, p. 64.

⁸ E. J. Revell, *The Designation of the Individual* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), p. 126.

⁹ W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: an Integrated Approach* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, rev. edn, 1997), p. 88.

¹⁰ Sternberg, *Poetics*, p. 266.

third occasion, creates a great deal of suspense: as a reader, one becomes curious to know if and when the king of Assyria will actually withdraw and return to his country.”¹¹

18:14-16

At this point in the 2 Kings account, Hezekiah is shown stripping the temple and royal palace of gold and giving it to Sennacherib. Significantly this act of submission in 2 Kings 18:14-16 is missing from Isaiah 36. Several issues of a textual critical and redactional nature are raised by this difference between the Kings and Isaiah accounts including the question of primacy and the form and provenance of the 2 Kings 18:14-16 pericope. Seitz has considered these questions in some depth in his book, “Zion’s Final Destiny”, in two sections: pages 51-61 and 141-146. He asserts that the Isaiah account is logical; after besieging several Judean cities, the Rabshakeh is sent by Sennacherib to persuade Hezekiah and his citizens to capitulate.¹² Seitz argues that 2 Kings 18:14-16 (account A) is intrusive and is not more historical than the rest of the account, which is often divided into two (B1 and B2).¹³ This moment of capitulation appears analogous to Ahaz’s actions as delineated in 2 Kings 16:5, 7-9 and may be seen as a blemish on Hezekiah’s record in order to put Josiah in a better light. Seitz summarizes his position thus: “Rather than viewing 18:14-16 as a more historical, annals citation, tradition-historically prior to accounts B1-B2, I see it as a later addition motivated by concerns indigenous to the Book of Kings.”¹⁴ Nor does he think that it was omitted from Isaiah because of some desire to idealize Hezekiah.¹⁵ However, Seitz’s position has been criticized by Williamson on several grounds, especially the consideration that the parallel that Seitz has found

¹¹ Van der Kooij, “Hezekiah”, p. 110.

¹² Seitz, *Destiny*, pp. 54-55; Campbell (*Prophets and Kings*, p. 196) assumes these verses were added to the Kings account.

¹³ Seitz, *Destiny*, p. 58. See also Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), p. 244.

¹⁴ Seitz, *Destiny*, p. 60.

¹⁵ Christopher R. Seitz, “Account A and the Annals of Sennacherib: A Reassessment”, *JSOT* 58 (1993), pp. 47-57 (56). For the contrary opinion, see Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* (BZAW, 171; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), p. 13.

in 2 Kings 16:5, 7-9 involves 18:13 as a significant element. This "...serves to bind verse 13 more closely with 14-16 and to suggest that the paragraph as a whole was framed with the wider concerns of the Deuteronomic History in view."¹⁶

The more common view is to accept the primacy of the 2 Kings account and to assume that 2 Kings 18:14-16 was deliberately omitted by the Isaiah redactor. This is the position taken by Williamson, who largely follows Gonçalves.¹⁷ Gonçalves argues that, whilst invasions such as that mentioned in 2 Kings 18:14-16 are sometimes introduced by a specific date in the form given in 2 Kings 18:13, prophetic stories such as those that follow Isaiah 36:1, never are. Secondly, he maintains that the agreement of v. 13 with vv. 14-16 in 2 Kings in focusing upon the whole country rather than upon Jerusalem, as in the stories that follow, is significant. Furthermore, vv. 14-16 need v. 13 as an introduction, whereas the longer accounts do not require the knowledge that is found in v.13. The first argument here would seem to be the strongest. Gonçalves' second argument may be countered by Seitz's observation that the Isaiah account is logical. At some point there is going to be a change of focus from the land of Judah to its capital city. That could come equally well after v.13 as after v.16 in 2 Kgs 18. It does not prove that vv. 14-16 originated there. Again the third point Gonçalves makes is not conclusive.

Another possibility is that 2 Kings 18:14-16 originally had a parallel in Isaiah 36, but this has been accidentally omitted through haplography. This suggestion has been propounded by Childs, but he admits that it is rather conjectural.¹⁸ One more theoretical possibility is that the author/redactor of the Deuteronomistic History and the author/redactor of the book of Isaiah both drew upon an independent source and tailored their material to suit their respective viewpoints. It is difficult to come to

¹⁶ H. G. M. Williamson, *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 200.

¹⁷ Williamson, *Book*, pp. 199-200; Gonçalves, *L'expédition*, pp. 356-362.

¹⁸ Childs, *Assyrian Crisis*, pp. 69-70. Cf. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 247; Mullen, "Crime and Punishment: The Sins of the King and the Despoliation of the Treasuries", *CBQ* 54

a firm conclusion about this matter, but the lack of a parallel section to 2 Kings 18:14-16 in Isaiah 36 is certainly significant, if the Isaiah narrative is to be read as it now stands.

As far as the Isaiah account is concerned, Hezekiah, although patently distressed at a later stage in the story, is never subservient to Sennacherib. Isa. 36:1 is the backdrop to the action that follows, but in itself, the attack on the other cities is not seen to produce any effect upon the Judahite king.¹⁹ In the Kings account, the effect of the inclusion of the narrative in 18:14-16 may suggest a heightening of tension. All the cities of Judah have been taken, and the payment of tribute to Sennacherib has not appeased him.

Hezekiah's Rebellion (18:7b) and the Payment of Tribute (18:14-16)

Another problem centres on 18:14-16. The summary found in 18:7b, that Hezekiah "rebelled against the king of Assyria, and would not serve him", appears to be contradicted by the report in vv. 14-16 (Account A).²⁰ In the latter notice, Hezekiah admits to having done wrong against the king of Assyria, who then demands three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. Hezekiah is then said to have given Sennacherib all the silver from the temple and the treasuries of the king's house, and the gold from the doors and doorposts of the temple. It seems strange that a notice that suggests a negative view of Hezekiah should be allowed to remain when Hezekiah has been described in such glowing colours as the paragon of faith in 18:3-8. Possibly, it was not seen in this way in ancient times.

This report of trying to propitiate a military threat is a conventional *topos* according to Long.²¹ There are several instances in the book of Kings

(1992), pp. 231-248 (245 n. 44)).

¹⁹ Contrast this with the effect of the invasion of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition on Ahaz and his people (Isa. 7:2).

²⁰ Mullen ("Sins", p. 245), for example, speaks of Hezekiah's decision not to serve Assyria as now being reversed. The attack of the Assyrians is also seen, by Mullen, as punishment by YHWH for being unfaithful to him and for reversing the decision not to serve Assyria.

²¹ Long, *2 Kings*, p. 205.

where kings seek political alliance and/or the aversion of a military threat by using treasure from the temple and palace treasuries. These others are found in 1 Kgs. 14:25-28 (Rehoboam); 15:17-19 (Asa); 2 Kgs. 12:18-19 (Jehoash); 14:11-14 (Amaziah); 16:7-9 (Ahaz); 24:10-13 (Jehoiachin). What is curious is that in all the other cases except Hezekiah there is the mention of the failure of the reigning monarch in respect of the *בָּמֹת*. They either fail to remove them or, as, for example, in the case Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:4), are said to have sacrificed at them. However, the verdicts upon these kings vary: Rehoboam (1 Kgs. 14:22) and Jehoiachin (2 Kgs. 24:9) did what was evil; similarly, Ahaz did not do what was right (2 Kgs. 16:2), whereas the rest did what was right in the eyes of YHWH. Mullen's conclusion is that "In each instance, the account of the despoliation of the temple and palace treasuries provided a vehicle by which the deuteronomistic writer could comment on the rightness of the reign of individual kings. As such, the notice serves as a part of the 'punishment' of historical judgment delivered from deuteronomistic ideology. This ideology in turn was necessitated, with the exception of Hezekiah, by the failure to purify and consolidate worship in Jerusalem and to remove the *bamoth*."²² It seems difficult to maintain this view in the face of the contrasting evaluations that are made of the various kings' reigns, especially since, as seen above, some kings, who fail to remove the *בָּמֹת*, are declared to have done what is right in the eyes of YHWH.²³

In regards to Hezekiah, Mullen maintains that "... the despoliation notice serves to introduce the failure of the king to remain firm in trusting Yahweh, and the 'punishment' exacted includes the loss of the treasuries of the temple and the palace as well as the Assyrian attack."²⁴ Mullen appears to be begging the question. Using the account of Rehoboam's reign (1 Kgs. 14:21-31), he argues that a pattern of punishment is

²² Mullen, "Sins", p. 247.

²³ Nadav Na'aman ("The Deuteronomist and Voluntary Servitude to Foreign Powers", *JSOT* 65 [1995], pp. 37-53 [44, n.18]) is also doubtful about "Mullen's suggestion that these notices consistently serve as a part of the 'punishment' for numerous rulers who failed to remove the high places."

²⁴ Mullen, "Sins", p. 247.

established for those monarchs who fail to lead the people in the proper worship of YHWH.²⁵ He admits that Hezekiah not only removed the *בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ* and undertook cultic reforms, but that he also trusted in YHWH and kept his commandments. Mullen does not differentiate sufficiently between the circumstances of the different monarchs, especially in respect of the reasons for the transfer of treasure to foreign rulers. As Na'aman notes, sometimes the treasure is taken by force as booty, as in the reign of Rehoboam (1 Kgs. 14:26), Amaziah (2 Kgs. 14:14), and Jehoiachin (2 Kgs. 24:13); sometimes it is paid as a bribe to foreign rulers as Asa (1 Kgs. 15:18) and Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:8) did; and in Jehoash's (2 Kgs. 12:19) and Hezekiah's (2 Kgs. 18:15) case it is paid in an attempt to avert a threat to Jerusalem.²⁶ Some kings had little say in what happened to their treasure, while Asa and Ahaz willingly hand over their treasure.

Na'aman demonstrates that Ahaz and Asa used silver and gold as a bribe (*שֶׁחָדַר*). Tadmor and Cogan maintain that this term "bears negative connotations"²⁷ and that the intention of the writer was to criticize Ahaz by using this term.²⁸ In the case of Ahaz the text states, "Then Rezin king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to wage war on Jerusalem, and they besieged Ahaz but could not conquer him" (2 Kgs. 16:5). Thus, his appeal to Tiglath-pileser, supported by his "present", may be construed as unnecessary. His apparent sycophantic behaviour towards Assyria is compounded by his message to Tiglath-pileser, which begins with the words, "I am your servant and your son" (2 Kgs. 16:7). This may be further indication of his voluntary submission to Assyria.²⁹ Ahaz also had a copy of an Assyrian altar built, and made offerings upon it (2 Kgs. 16:10-13). Asa sent a bribe to Ben-hadad to encourage him to break his covenant with Baasha, king of Israel (1 Kgs.

²⁵ Mullen, "Sins", p. 237.

²⁶ Na'aman, "Voluntary Servitude", p. 44.

²⁷ For a discussion of the meaning of this word see Hayim Tadmor and Mordechai Cogan, "Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser in the Book of Kings: Historiographic Considerations", *Bib* 60 (1979), pp.491-508 (499).

²⁸ Tadmor and Cogan, "Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser", p. 502.

²⁹ Na'aman, "Voluntary Servitude", p. 44. Tadmor and Cogan, "Ahaz and Tiglath-Pileser", pp. 504-505.

15:18-20).³⁰ Ahaz's behaviour may not come as a surprise in view of the theological evaluation accorded to him: "And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD his God, as his father David had done, but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel" (2 Kgs. 16:2-3). On the other hand "Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD" (1 Kgs. 15:11), the only negative aspect being his failure to remove the *בַּמֹּזֶת*. Therefore, the handing over of treasure, even if performed as a bribe, may not be as damning as Mullen, for example, suggests.

In any case, with regards to Jehoash and Hezekiah, it may be that they felt that they had little alternative, given the threats they were facing. Na'aman also differentiates between these two kings, however. He argues, "The former is said to have paid the king of Aram all the sacred objects and all the gold (2 Kgs 12.19), whereas the latter paid the Assyrian king both gold and silver but according to the text took only silver from the treasury (2 Kgs 18.14-15). The difference is apparently traceable to the author's positive judgment of Hezekiah and his efforts to present him in the most favourable light possible."³¹

Possibly, it may be argued that Hezekiah faltered for a time in his trust in YHWH, and that the theological evaluation, which was so positive, was provided to set up a tension in the story. Yet reading 18:14-16 in the context of the statements of vv. 5-6 and the remaining Hezekiah narratives, it is not certain that that is how this notice need be read in the final form of the text. In vv. 5-6 his trust in YHWH is said to be beyond compare and that he held fast to YHWH and kept the commandments. There is also no criticism of Hezekiah in vv. 14-16. Furthermore these verses follow the notice regarding the northern kingdom (vv. 9-12), which states that the Israelites not only refused to obey the voice of YHWH, but they deliberately transgressed his covenant. The situation in the north is in clear contrast to the situation in Judah. Thus, the context would argue against a negative reading of Hezekiah's character in vv. 14-16.

³⁰ Na'aman, "Voluntary Servitude", pp. 42-45.

However, by the chronology given in Kings (2 Kgs. 18:1, 13) eleven years may have elapsed from the initial rebellion against Assyria to the situation where Sennacherib has successfully taken most of the cities of Judah.³² It might be argued that Hezekiah's previous brave stand was no longer a viable option. Theologically, however, Hezekiah's position seems disappointing to say the least. The man who is described as trusting in YHWH to such an extent that no previous or later king could measure up to him in this aspect, apparently betrays that trust by "kow-towing" to the Assyrian king.

Konkel suggests that the payment of tribute does not necessarily diminish the significance of the eventual victory, as full victory for the Assyrians would be to see the state of Judah made into a full province of the Assyrian empire. By paying tribute, Jerusalem kept its independence.³³ He maintains that this does not reduce the significance of its independence, nor does it negate faith in the God who made it possible.³⁴ Konkel refers to Haag who views Hezekiah's actions in 18:14-16 as a last human attempt at securing salvation, which on the one hand is a natural reaction in view of the words of the Assyrian officer, but which on the other may be seen as part of a divine plan. Haag comments, "On sait que la confiance en la Providence n'empêche pas l'homme de se servir des moyens humains dont il dispose, mais qu'elle l'exige au contraire."³⁵

³¹ Na'aman, "Voluntary Servitude", p. 44 n. 19.

³² Richard S. Hess ("Hezekiah and Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18-20" in Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham [eds.], *Zion, City of Our God* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], pp. 23-41 [38]) *inter alios* suggests that Account A is the summary account describing what was considered the most important events and the beginning and end of the action, whilst Account B is the elaboration of the details of the intervening events. "Thus the tribute paid by Hezekiah in A may be something that happened after the deliverance recorded in B. This would seem more logical in any case. Sennacherib, forced to retire due to a sudden crisis in his army, would still threaten Hezekiah with subsequent campaigns. In order to guarantee that this would not occur, Hezekiah submitted to the king and paid him tribute." However, whilst it is true that the events may not necessarily be in chronological order, it seems unlikely that Hezekiah would pay tribute to Sennacherib after the Assyrian has suffered such a great defeat.

³³ Similarly Long (2 Kings, p. 205) argues that the payment of tribute should not be seen as capitulation, but rather as "a strategy to relieve military pressure on Jerusalem and to preserve Judah's independence."

³⁴ Konkel, *Biblical Tradition*, p. 111.

³⁵ H. Haag, "La Campagne de Sennachérib contre Jérusalem en 701", *RB* 58 (1951), pp. 348-359 (355-356).

Seitz reads Account A in context with Account B, in which he sees the emphasis resting on the demonstration that Sennacherib's blasphemy will not go unpunished. Seitz puts the question: "Is the point of Account A, then to be explained in part as involving a depiction not so much of Hezekiah, but of the king of Assyria?"³⁶ Thus, Sennacherib is revealed to be thoroughly dishonourable and arrogant, accepting tribute and yet, still seeking to overthrow Hezekiah, and to take the city of Jerusalem. Seitz seems to see little contradiction between the statement of Hezekiah's rebellion in 18:7 and the paying of tribute in 18:14-16. He argues that "2 Kgs 18:14-16 makes it clear that when he considered even a one-time payment to the Assyrian king, in order to avoid military assault, the result was negative. The emphasis is not on the disobedience of Hezekiah specifically, but on the fruitlessness of foreign rapprochement generally."³⁷

Perhaps the narrative should be read in relation to YHWH's purposes. It could be argued that YHWH permitted Hezekiah to act in the way he did, so that the divine sovereignty over Sennacherib might be displayed. The tribute offered to Sennacherib may have been like the bait in a trap. Once Hezekiah had confessed that he had wronged the Assyrian king and paid him tribute, Sennacherib was more confident of attacking Jerusalem. Perhaps the Assyrian should be imagined as thinking that the king, who apparently had boldly rebelled against him, and had been successful like his ancestor David against the Philistines, was now weakening in his resolve. This was the time in Sennacherib's eyes not just to receive the tribute, but also to teach the rebellious Hezekiah a lesson. Divine planning necessitated a way of getting Sennacherib to confront Hezekiah, so that the Assyrian king might be humiliated in recompense for his arrogance and his army might be decimated.

Although the actions of Hezekiah, in rebelling against Assyria and then later paying tribute, seem contradictory, for some reason the narrator

³⁶ Seitz, "Account A", p. 56.

makes no negative comment against Hezekiah. It is surprising that Hezekiah's apparent failure is not noted in view of the superlative statements made previously. It is difficult to be sure of the precise reason for the lack of comment. Possibly, it was a matter of "needs must" as Konkel seems to imply, and that this was acceptable because it meant Jerusalem remained independent. On the other hand, as Seitz suggests, the emphasis is not on Hezekiah, but on Sennacherib and his character and, therefore, the contradiction is not made explicit. Perhaps Hezekiah is to be seen as being ironic in his deference to Sennacherib and it should be viewed as part of a divine plan to deal finally with the Assyrian aggressor.

In terms of plot, the failure of the tribute to appease Sennacherib heightens the tension. What has worked in the past now fails. The reader is left wondering how Hezekiah can possibly extricate himself from this parlous situation.

18:17-35

The Rabshakeh, the Tartan, and the Rabsaris³⁸ come up to Jerusalem. The geographical setting of a narrative is an important element, which closely relates to both plot and characters.³⁹ The place may itself indicate or support the theological message of the narrative. The association of this location with King Ahaz in Isaiah 7 has been noted above. The location at the conduit of the upper pool is probably intended to rekindle the memory of a previous challenge to faith. The aqueduct and its water may suggest a symbolic significance. It carried the water necessary for life into the city. The defence of such a location would be crucial to the survival of a city undergoing a long siege. The Assyrian forces pose a threat to the survival of Hezekiah and his citizens. It emphasizes the seriousness of the situation. The threat that was only in the background in the first verse has

³⁷ Seitz, "Account A", p. 56.

³⁸ According to Cohn (2 Kings, pp. 128-129), by referring to these three officials by their titles without using their names the narrator emphasizes their weightiness.

³⁹ Tremper Longman III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1987), p. 94.

now moved centre stage. It is a powerful threat, for the Rabshakeh's words are backed by a large army.⁴⁰ Hezekiah is referred to as King Hezekiah at Jerusalem. In the Kings account, he has already been designated the king of Judah in 18:1, 14(twice), 16. However, in the Isaianic account, which omits these verses, Hezekiah is not given his full designation. This might support the theory of the importation of the narrative from Kings or another source. It may signify that everything is now focussed on the preservation of Jerusalem.⁴¹

In 18:18, the three emissaries of Hezekiah are named as Eliakim, Shebna and Joah.⁴² Hezekiah himself does not confront the Rabshakeh. One wonders whether this was usual practice or a way of signifying that Hezekiah is not to be seen submitting himself in any way to the Assyrians.

The first of three messages, two in speech form and one in letter form, now follows. In form, the first speech appears to resemble prophetic speech.⁴³ The Assyrian king, who assumes the role of a counterpart to God, is the originator of the message. His Rabshakeh speaks as if he is his prophet.⁴⁴ It seems that the author/redactor's intention is to be ironic; the prophet-like representative of an alien king speaks like a servant of YHWH, even like Isaiah himself. The opening formula, "Thus says the great king, the King of Assyria" parallels the usual "Thus says the LORD". It is "... a sweeping claim of authority."⁴⁵ As will be seen below, even some of the content of the message may be in agreement with Isaiah. The effect is to heighten the audacity of the Assyrian. Not only

⁴⁰ Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat", p. 81.

⁴¹ Willem A.M. Beuken, *Isaiah Part II/Volume 2: Isaiah Chapters 28-39* (HCOT; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), p. 347.

⁴² See Beuken (*Isaiah II*, p. 348) for discussion of the functions of the three Judahite representatives and the meaning of the term "Rabshakeh".

⁴³ Peter D. Miscall, *Isaiah*, (Readings; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) p. 89. Cf. Rudman, "Rhetorical Study", p. 101. On the question regarding the status of the speech see Ehud Ben Zvi, "Who Wrote the Speech of Rabshakeh and When?", *JBL* 109 (1990), pp. 79-92; Mbuwayesango, *Defense of Zion*, pp. 60-61. The words of the Rabshakeh may be his actual words (or a summation of them), may be the creation of a prophetic circle shortly after the event, although the siege was real, or may have been composed much later.

⁴⁴ Rudman ("Rhetorical Study", p. 103) speaks of the Rabshakeh as an "anti-Isaiah".

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39* (WBComp; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), p. 285.

does he threaten YHWH's city, temple and king, but speaks like his prophet in the process. Sennacherib is portrayed as if on a level with YHWH, or even greater than YHWH.⁴⁶ This impression is reinforced in the second speech when the gods of various nations are listed as ineffective against the Assyrian war machine (See 18:33-35).

The opening words of the speech reveal something of the attitude of the Rabshakeh. Hezekiah is simply referred to by his name without title or description in any way. The omission of Hezekiah's title by an official deputation suggests disrespect towards the king. As Revell asserts, the Rabshakeh's "... disregard of Hezekiah's status as king adds a significant psychological element to his argument on the weakness of Hezekiah, and the futility of opposing the king of Assyria."⁴⁷ In contrast Sennacherib is described as "the great king", a title, which admittedly is the one commonly used of Assyrian kings.⁴⁸ However, the use of such a title for the Assyrian king in proximity to the name of Judah's king without any title suggests the notion of the superiority of Sennacherib over Hezekiah.

It is noteworthy that questions form about half of the first speech of the Rabshakeh. Questions are also to be found in the transition to the second speech and in the speech itself (18:27, 33-35).⁴⁹ This may well be a typical ploy in propaganda terms, because the enemy is cajoled into thinking about the message.⁵⁰ Rhetorical questions that cast doubt on the competence of the leaders and seek to undermine their policies are not surprising in such a situation.

⁴⁶ On the hubris of Sennacherib, see Donald E. Gowan, *When Man Becomes God: Humanism and Hybris in the Old Testament* (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1975), pp. 29-38.

⁴⁷ Revell, *Designation*, p. 131.

⁴⁸ For further details of the origin and use of this title, see Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 231.

⁴⁹ Gallagher, *Campaign*, p. 176.

⁵⁰ Gallagher (*Campaign*, pp. 174-186) adduces examples of propaganda from World War II.

The root בַּטַּח appears five times in the first speech (18:19 [twice], 20, 21, 22). The first question of the Rabshakeh is the heading for the rest of the speech: “What is this confidence in which you are trusting?

(מָה הַבְּטָחוֹן הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּטַחְתָּ) (18:19; literal translation).” Opening words often reveal much. Here both the theme of the narrative and the questioning nature of the Assyrian are made clear. The aim is to undermine Hezekiah’s and the people’s faith in both human and divine resources. Clements notes that “The author skilfully uses the Rabshakeh’s speech to put his finger on the central issue that is at stake in the entire episode covered by the narrative: faith in Yahweh.”⁵¹

Hezekiah, according to the Rabshakeh, has only mere words. The politician must be adept at speech, but the successful politician must have more than speech to be effective in the terms of this world. Hezekiah is a poor politician in this world’s eyes, as he does not have the means or power to back up his words.⁵² “Mere talk”, according to Prov. 14:23, “leads only to poverty.” There is a thread of irony that runs through the narrative on this motif of speaking. Some of the points on this theme, which will be examined in more detail below, include the following. In 2 Kgs 18:26 there is the matter of which language (Hebrew or Aramaic) is appropriate for the Rabshakeh to use. The people sitting on the wall are silent and do not answer one word (18:36). In 19:6 Isaiah insists that Hezekiah should not be afraid of the words of the servants of Sennacherib. Even though they may be backed by a powerful army, they are to be treated as just words, as the Rabshakeh does with the king of Judah’s words. Then Sennacherib will hear a rumour, which will cause him to return to his own land (19:7). How ironic that the king, apparently with all the power, can be compelled to return to his native country just by mere words! Hezekiah has used words to ask Isaiah to pray that YHWH will rebuke the mocking words of the Assyrian (19:3-4). Again, we find Hezekiah praying directly to God in 19:15-19, pleading that God might

⁵¹ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 281-2.

⁵² See the comments in Jacques Ellul, *The Politics of God and the Politics of Man* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 146-147.

hear the words of Sennacherib. The words of YHWH, which dominate the second half of ch. 19, spell doom upon this venture of Sennacherib.

In this first speech, the words of the Rabshakeh raise an important question regarding whether or not Hezekiah himself has been involved in relying upon Egypt (18:21). This affects the way in which the character of Hezekiah is viewed in the Hezekiah narratives. If he is considered *not* to have made such an alliance, Hezekiah appears to be a man constantly trusting in YHWH. On the other hand, if he were implicated in relying upon Egypt, his faith in YHWH would seem to have flourished only of late. Seitz argues that, as the Rabshakeh is a blasphemer, the charge, which he makes against Hezekiah, cannot be accepted as proof that the king was in alliance with Egypt.⁵³ This may not necessarily follow. While it may be the case that the character of the Assyrian commander is apparently morally doubtful, it does not mean that everything he says must be a lie. The most cunning deception is that which is close to the truth. If the Rabshakeh's purpose is to persuade the Jerusalemites to surrender, his words must seem to be reliable and have at least some semblance to the truth. Seitz admits that a large number of scholars, including Bright, Laato, Dion, Clements, and Gonçalves believe Hezekiah to have made an alliance with Egypt.⁵⁴ Yet, although all these scholars assume that Hezekiah has negotiated with Egypt, Seitz insists that Hezekiah's name is not mentioned in Isaiah's bitter condemnations. He maintains, "Account B was composed precisely to illustrate the faithful conformity of King Hezekiah to the will of God as proclaimed by Isaiah."⁵⁵ Seitz does not really deal with the question of the identity of the perpetrators of foreign alliances. "The answer is purely a matter of conjecture", according to Seitz.⁵⁶

Darr rejects Seitz's inference that a rejection of the claim by the Rabshakeh in Isa. 36:10 (2 Kgs 18:25) that YHWH himself has sent the

⁵³ Seitz, *Destiny*, p. 73.

⁵⁴ Seitz, *Destiny*, pp.76-78.

⁵⁵ Seitz, *Destiny*, p.80.

Assyrian forces, must result in a rejection of the earlier charge that Hezekiah has depended on Egyptian help.⁵⁷ She believes it is possible that the Rabshakeh is cunningly organizing his arguments, so that he begins with what is irrefutable, the making of an alliance with Egypt, to the distorted truth regarding the removal of altars and high places displeasing YHWH to the unverifiable assertion that YHWH told him to go up against Judah. Seitz, on the other hand, seems to assume that all the charges against Hezekiah are equally false. While Darr's arguments may have some validity, taking the text as it stands, it must be stated with Seitz that Hezekiah is never named as seeking an alliance with Egypt.

The sentence structure of 18:21 is also noteworthy. The object of Hezekiah's trust, Egypt, is cleverly withheld until the last moment (18:21). "The delay builds suspense and the naming of Egypt allows a momentary relief, since the Judahite emissaries can still have confidence in YHWH."⁵⁸ Yet this soon changes. Even YHWH cannot be relied upon, asserts the Rabshakeh, because Hezekiah has removed his altars and high places (2 Kgs 18:22). The Rabshakeh says:

"But if you say⁵⁹ to me, 'We rely on the LORD our God,' is it not he whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, saying to Judah and to Jerusalem, 'You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem'?"

The Rabshakeh emphasizes the relationship that should exist between YHWH and his people by using the first person plural pronoun in his sarcastic, pre-emptory quoting of the stock answer that they are likely to give.⁶⁰

Reading the narrative as a straightforward account it would appear that the Rabshakeh misunderstands the Hezekian reforms. He seems to think that these reforms must incur wrath from YHWH. Whether the people on the

⁵⁶ Seitz, *Destiny*, p. 79.

⁵⁷ Katheryn P. Darr, "No Strength to Deliver: A Contextual Analysis of Hezekiah's Proverb in Isaiah 37:3b", in Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney (eds.), *New Visions of Isaiah* (JSOTSup, 214; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), pp. 219-256 (239).

⁵⁸ Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 130.

⁵⁹ 2 Kings 18:22 has *תאמרו*, but the verb is singular in Isa. 36:7.

⁶⁰ Revell, *Designation*, p. 210.

wall would concur with the Rabshakeh's comments is not certain. They may have agreed with him, if they were country folk according to Darr.⁶¹ Zvi mentions the view that the speech possibly originated from a prophetic circle within Israel that was hostile to the reforms.⁶² However, the reader of the canonical book of Kings is clearly aware of the true situation. The reforms betray a Deuteronomistic outlook that would make the Assyrian's argument seem very stupid.⁶³ Long suggests, "The writer characterizes the Rabshakeh as one who knows Israel's affairs intimately, and yet – from the reader's perspective – comically misunderstands them."⁶⁴

The weakness of Hezekiah's military position seems to be obvious to the Assyrian commander who ironically suggests making a wager (18:23). In effect, the Assyrian is boasting of the superiority of his forces, which is a common propaganda tactic.⁶⁵ He proposes to provide 2,000 horses, if Hezekiah can supply 2,000 riders for them: "Come now, make a wager with my master the king of Assyria: I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders upon them." Writing from a cultural anthropological viewpoint, Botha claims 18:23-24 as an example of "challenge and response".⁶⁶ He explains this as "... a type of social communication aimed at dislodging the addressee from his position of honour." Such a challenge had three phases: (1) the challenge on the part of the challenger; (2) the perception of the message by the addressee and the public at large; and (3) the reaction of the receiving individual and the evaluation of that reaction by the public.⁶⁷ The insulting words of the Rabshakeh present a challenge to the honour of Hezekiah, whom, it is suggested, cannot even repulse a captain of lowest rank.⁶⁸ The second and third stages will be examined below. Here again the term **בַּחֲבֵרָה** is found

⁶¹ Darr, "No Strength", p. 239 n. 34.

⁶² Zvi, "Speech", p. 79.

⁶³ Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 386.

⁶⁴ Long, *2 Kings*, p. 214.

⁶⁵ Gallagher, *Campaign*, p. 176.

⁶⁶ Botha, "Etiquette", p. 40.

⁶⁷ Botha, "Etiquette", p. 40.

⁶⁸ When the Rabshakeh speaks of "a single captain among the least of my master's

on the lips of the Rabshakeh, as he again implies reliance upon Egypt and its chariotry.

The speech ends with the supreme irony that the Rabshakeh claims that his master has heard from YHWH himself and has commanded him to destroy Judah. This claim is emphasized by the repetition of the name YHWH in the second part of the verse, where a pronoun could have been used.⁶⁹ Yet the Assyrian's seemingly amazing claim may arguably receive some support in the book of Isaiah. In Isa. 10:5-11, God is portrayed as saying that he will send the king of Assyria against the people of his wrath, but not to destroy them completely as was the intention of the Assyrians. On the other hand, it does not need to be assumed that Isaiah's words are being put into the mouth of Sennacherib. It is known from Assyrian royal inscriptions that a king could claim a divine imperative for taking a land. For example, both Sargon II and Cyrus claimed that Marduk had called them to march against Babylon.⁷⁰ However, Sargon II and Cyrus claimed to have received instruction from one of their own gods. This might suggest that the claim about YHWH ordering the Assyrian would seem somewhat unusual. Possibly the knowing reader is again expected to notice the irony of the situation.

A brief narrative interlude follows (2 Kgs 18:26-28), where Hezekiah's representatives plead with the Rabshakeh to communicate with them in Aramaic rather than Hebrew, so that the people on the wall will not understand. The request suggests that the Rabshakeh is already using Hebrew, which may appear to be a "climb down" for him. Yet, he may be unaware that Hezekiah's emissaries understand Aramaic and uses Hebrew, because in his arrogance he thinks they are unlikely to be educated in the diplomatic language of the Assyrian empire.⁷¹ This might be seen as a further challenge to Hezekiah. The Rabshakeh is deliberately

servants", he may well be referring to himself. See Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 351.

⁶⁹ Revell, *Designation*, pp. 64-65.

⁷⁰ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39* (AB, 19; New York: Doubleday, 2000), p. 471; Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 232.

⁷¹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), p. 278.

seeking to humiliate the king of Judah in the eyes of his people. According to Botha, the more public the insult is, the more serious it is understood to be.⁷² The reason given by Hezekiah's representatives is taken at face value by most commentators. They understand the ministers to be fearful that the propaganda of the Rabshakeh will affect the populace of the city. So, for example, Beuken states, "Sure of what he is doing, the Rabshakeh insists on public debate as part of his tactic of psychological warfare."⁷³ Furthermore, Beuken suggests that Hezekiah's representatives are guilty of demonstrating the weakness of their faith in YHWH. Childs also implies that the Judean negotiators are anxious that the people on the wall should not hear the words of the Rabshakeh, and that their plea for him to speak in Aramaic plays into his hands because he is there "... not merely to communicate a message, but rather to persuade and agitate."⁷⁴

On the other hand, it could be a subterfuge on the part of the Judeans, who have confidence in the reforms of Hezekiah and in the people's acceptance of them, to encourage the Rabshakeh to speak in a louder voice to enable the people on the wall to hear what he is saying. The thinking of the courtiers may be that, if the people hear the Rabshakeh for themselves, they will be convinced of the foolishness of his words and pay no attention to them. This assumes a strong loyalty on the part of the Jerusalemites to their king, but the statement of v. 21 that "they were silent and answered him not a word, for the king's command was 'Do not answer him'" indeed suggests that they were obedient subjects.⁷⁵ That the Rabshakeh responds by shouting in a loud voice in the Judean dialect indicates the success of the ploy. Human nature being what it is, the Assyrian does the opposite of what he thinks the Judeans want. If this interpretation is correct, it portrays a sophistication on the part of Hezekiah's representatives in contrast to the Rabshakeh, who is thus portrayed as a gullible buffoon.

⁷² Botha, "Etiquette", pp. 40-41.

⁷³ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 352.

⁷⁴ Childs, *Assyrian Crisis*, p. 86

⁷⁵ Botha ("Etiquette", p. 41) argues that it would have been inappropriate for those on the wall to answer in any case, as "The challenge had to be taken up by the person to whom

The Rabshakeh commences his second speech found in 2 Kgs 18:27. His reply is that his master's words are intended for the people on the wall, not just the king. There is no doubt an element of truth in this, for the speech gives the impression of a besieger seeking to cause disaffection among the ranks.⁷⁶ The Rabshakeh again omits Hezekiah's title in 18:29-32, while referring to Sennacherib as "the king" or "the king of Assyria". Again, disrespect is intended towards the king of Judah. Psychologically, the message suggests that there is now only one king that matters, and he is the one in charge of the situation. The main motif in this section is נָצַל (to deliver), which is found nine times in verses 29-35. First, three negative commands are issued by the Rabshakeh (vv. 29-31). Again, the aim is to undermine faith.⁷⁷ The Rabshakeh speaks of the inability of Hezekiah to deliver the Judahites (v. 29): "Thus says the king: 'Do not let Hezekiah deceive you, for he will not be able to deliver (נָצַל) you out of my hand.'"

Then the Rabshakeh proceeds to insinuate that there is no point in being persuaded by Hezekiah to trust in YHWH. "Do not let Hezekiah make you to rely (בָּטַח) on the LORD by saying, The LORD will surely deliver us (נָצַל); this city will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria (v. 30)." As Knoppers puts it: "The verb *ns'l* serves as a counterpoint to *bth*, because, according to the Rabshakeh, all those in whom Hezekiah has trusted cannot deliver."⁷⁸ Later this term will be used by Sennacherib, who considers the ability to deliver a proof of divinity (2 Kgs 19:11-12).⁷⁹

The third command is simply "Do not listen to Hezekiah..." (v. 31). This is followed in propagandist fashion by an appeal to the people of Jerusalem, inviting them to make peace with Sennacherib and to go out to him to join his side.⁸⁰ Ironically, the Rabshakeh beguiles the

it was addressed."

⁷⁶ Zvi, "Speech", p. 80.

⁷⁷ Smelik, *Converting*, p. 113.

⁷⁸ Knoppers, "Incomparability", p. 419 n. 34.

⁷⁹ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 340.

⁸⁰ Gallagher, *Campaign*, p. 180. Similarly, Blenkinsopp (*Isaiah 1-39*, p. 473) reads it as an invitation to surrender. However, it is difficult to know the precise meaning of the

Jerusalemites, having accused Hezekiah of beguiling them.⁸¹ Various temptations are dangled before the people: the provision of vines, fig trees and water cisterns and the promise of emigration to a new land. The repetition of the word אֶרֶץ (land) seems to be significant (18:32).⁸² It occurs at the beginning of four consecutive clauses in this verse. This device, anaphora, emphasizes a prominent Old Testament theme.⁸³ A connection may also be seen between these enticements and the privations of 18:27.⁸⁴ It is a “carrot and stick” approach, a choice between eating and drinking your *own* waste or eating your *own* fruit and having good water to drink. Vines and fig trees are often used in the Hebrew Bible as symbols of Israel, the Promised Land.⁸⁵ As Brueggemann puts it, “The speaker knows enough of Israel’s root dream of ‘vine and fig tree’ to use the code words.”⁸⁶ However, the assumption by the Assyrian that one piece of earth is as good as another demonstrates his lack of understanding of the symbolic meaning, and indicates to the citizens of Jerusalem that the Rabshakeh’s proposal is fraudulent. Here again the arrogance of the king of Assyria may be evidenced. He has set himself up as the one who will lead them into a new land just as YHWH delivered the people from Egypt and brought them into Canaan.⁸⁷ He speaks as if he is a rival god to YHWH.⁸⁸ Indeed, there seems to be no end to Sennacherib’s arrogance. He claims that no gods have been able to deliver their peoples from Assyrian domination, indeed from his own hand (18:33-34). Thus,

exhortation to make peace (literally “make blessing with me” [עֲשׂוּ-אִתִּי בְרָכָה]). (The Targum has “peace”).

⁸¹ Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 132.

⁸² Isa. 36:17 omits אֶרֶץ זֵית יִצְהָר וְדִבְשׁ וְחִיו וְלֹא תִמְחוּ וְאֶל-חֲשָׁמְעוּ אֶל-חֲזָקִיהוּ. The wording of the next sentence (found in Isa. 36:18) is also different from Kings. The change from כִּי (2 Kgs 18:32) to כִּן (Isa. 36:18) may suggest a less disparaging view of Hezekiah. See Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4*, pp. 13-14.

⁸³ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, p. 212.

⁸⁴ Smelik, *Converting*, p. 114. Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 338.

⁸⁵ The language may hark back to the “golden” days of Solomon’s reign as recorded in 1 Kgs 5:5 (English 4:25). See Hull, *Hezekiah*, pp. 337-338.

⁸⁶ Walter Brueggemann, “II Kings 18-19: The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic”, *HBT* 7 (1985), pp. 1-42 (14).

⁸⁷ Cf. Rudman (“Rhetorical Study”, p. 106), who notes the use of the verb יָצָא in 2 Kgs 18:31. Cf. Exod. 13:3, 8; 16:1; 23:15; 34:18.

⁸⁸ Rudman (“Rhetorical Study”, p. 108) thinks that עֲשׂוּ-אִתִּי בְרָכָה may indicate that the Assyrian wishes to usurp YHWH from his position as Israel’s God and offers a new covenant with similar blessings to those offered by YHWH.

YHWH is equated with these other gods, and Sennacherib claims divine power. In Smelik's words: "At this point, the Assyrian discloses his real nature: his king is a blasphemer and all his words have only been a distortion of Old Testament prophecy. Notwithstanding their resemblance to the words of the prophets, their intention is completely different."⁸⁹

The rhetorical construction of the speech appears to be carefully designed to cast doubt on YHWH's ability to deliver Jerusalem. Three questions are posed, each with "gods" as the subject, each expecting a negative answer. The ability or willingness of any god to deliver is made dubious (v. 33), the presence of any god is denied (v. 34), and then YHWH's uniqueness is denied (v. 35).⁹⁰ Brueggemann arranges the verses 18:32b-35 thus:

The LORD will deliver...

has any god delivered...

gods of Hamath, etc., deliver...

all the gods deliver...

The LORD should deliver.

"The opening and closing refrain concerning Yahweh concludes that Yahweh has not delivered because other gods do not deliver."⁹¹

Brueggemann and many other commentators assume that the implication of the words in vv. 33-35 is that YHWH is being depicted as powerless,⁹² which would constitute an insult to YHWH. However, Gallagher may be correct in his observation that it would be improbable that the Rabshakeh would do this. First, it would be inadvisable from a propaganda viewpoint. Secondly, it does not accord with Assyrian belief which viewed Ashur as supreme god and other gods as co-operating with him. Thirdly, it stands in tension to 18: 25, where the Assyrian claims to have come to Jerusalem at the instigation of YHWH.⁹³ For Gallagher, the Rabshakeh is arguing that YHWH *will* not save the Jerusalemites, not that

⁸⁹ Smelik, *Converting*, p. 114.

⁹⁰ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, pp. 354-355.

⁹¹ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 498.

⁹² For example, Childs, *Assyrian Crisis*, p. 87; Gonçalves, *L'expédition*, pp. 386-387.

⁹³ Gallagher, *Campaign*, pp. 207-208.

he cannot do it.⁹⁴ However, this can still be understood as a derogation of YHWH, as the Jerusalemites are his people that he would hopefully want to save. In any case, within the narrative it seems that the words of the Rabshakeh are to be read as a disparagement of YHWH, since Hezekiah is depicted as interpreting the Assyrian's words in this way (19:4).

It is interesting to note that YHWH, although recognised as the god of Jerusalem, is not mentioned in connection with Samaria. There are several possible explanations for this. The narrator may wish to paint Sennacherib as ignorant of the extent of Yahwistic worship (compare 18:22) in order to belittle him before the reader. Possibly, there was a syncretistic situation in the northern kingdom that made such a statement credible. On the other hand, perhaps the narrator is not wanting to give more ammunition to the Assyrian. If YHWH was perceived to be the god of Samaria, then he had conspicuously failed to protect that land. The Assyrian's arguments would have seemed conclusive if that were acknowledged.⁹⁵

18:36-19:2

A short narrative section, 2 Kgs 18:36-19:2, is found before the message of the three emissaries to Isaiah. This section describes the silence of the people who show total obedience to Hezekiah.⁹⁶ That he is in control is indicated by the phrase, "king's command", where Hezekiah is referred to by his title rather than his name, confirming his role in the situation.⁹⁷ The point of view changes to Hezekiah. Eliakim, Shebna and Joah came (וַיָּבֹאוּ) to the king, rather than "went". The three officials report to Hezekiah, who is mentioned without his title. They come before him with their robes torn, which may be seen as an indication of their despair, or perhaps more precisely, as a sign of their shock at the way in which their

⁹⁴ Gallagher, *Campaign*, p. 209.

⁹⁵ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 355.

⁹⁶ וַיִּשְׁכְּחֻם is missing in Isa. 36:21 and in LXX. Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 233) think it was a gloss. They feel that it is problematic that Hezekiah should order the people to be silent before it was known that the Rabshakeh wanted to address the people.

king and YHWH have been humiliated by the Assyrian.⁹⁸ Whilst Hezekiah is still regarded as king by the people at large, the omission of his title in verse 22 may be the narrator's way, according to Revell, of suggesting that the three emissaries regard Hezekiah "as if already dethroned by the Assyrians."⁹⁹ On the other hand, in the next verse (19:1), he is again "King Hezekiah", even though he too tears his clothes. It might have been expected that the title would have again been omitted, but it may be the case that his action is seen as positive by the narrator.

The king not only tears his clothes, but also puts on sackcloth and goes into the house of the Lord. Sawyer suggests that Hezekiah has donned sackcloth and torn his clothes not only to indicate humility, but possibly also as a sign of repentance.¹⁰⁰ Such an act of penitence would be very appropriate if Hezekiah felt that he had failed to trust in YHWH by seeking an alliance with Egypt. Yet, the text specifies that Hezekiah was reacting to the words of the Rabshakeh, not to his own actions. If these acts are understood as signs of grief at the way a superior has been dishonoured, then Hezekiah must be doing it for the sake of his God. "It stands to Hezekiah's credit that he was more concerned for the honour of YHWH than for his own."¹⁰¹ The narrator is indicating that this is not the end for Hezekiah; the full designation, "King Hezekiah", near the beginning of the sentence draws attention to the man who is still in charge, not least, because he is aware of a greater being who is over him. He also sends his ministers and senior priests covered in sackcloth to Isaiah. YHWH has been dishonoured and, therefore, YHWH himself must address the challenge. This is the first reference to Isaiah, who is thus introduced halfway through the narrative. This may well imply that he is a figure who is well known,¹⁰² but it also suggests that in this

⁹⁷ Revell, *Designation*, p. 126.

⁹⁸ Botha, "Etiquette", p. 41.

⁹⁹ Revell, *Designation*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁰ John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah Volume II* (DSB; Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1986), p. 27. Sawyer sees a parallel with Jonah 3, but it must be noted that there the repentant are Ninevites, not members of YHWH's covenant community.

¹⁰¹ Botha, "Etiquette", p. 42.

¹⁰² Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 274.

narrative he is not a leading character.

19:3-13

Hezekiah describes the day as a day of rebuke, as well as distress and disgrace (19:3). Watts seems to think that it is the day itself that should be rebuked, but it would make little sense for the day to be taken as the object of distress or disgrace.¹⁰³ It is more likely that Hezekiah is speaking of his own feelings and possibly those of his people.

Hezekiah is in a state of helplessness, which he compares to the exhaustion, and powerlessness of a woman in labour, who is unable to give the final push so that the child may be born. It is a painful picture of distress. Darr discusses the meaning of Hezekiah's proverb at some length.¹⁰⁴ Darr seeks to analyze the three "situations" involved with the proverb. The "proverb situation" concerns the form of the actual proverb and is as described above; the "context situation" is the threat of the Assyrian king against Jerusalem and finally the "interaction situation" describes who is speaking the words to whom. Hezekiah is the one who is speaking the proverb to Isaiah through messengers. Darr discusses the correlation between the proverb situation and the context situation, as different interpretations are possible. Hezekiah could be identifying himself (possibly along with his people) with the women in labour, indicating their inability to deliver themselves.¹⁰⁵ Alternatively, the babies may be seen as the subjects of correlation suggesting an inability to continue to live. As Darr herself concedes,¹⁰⁶ it makes little difference which party is chosen for the correlation, as both are at the point of death, although, as the mothers are not specifically mentioned, the babies are the more likely candidates. Darr favours a dual correlation: Hezekiah sees his citizens as the babies and himself, and perhaps his advisers, as the

¹⁰³ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1987), p. 34.

¹⁰⁴ Darr, "No Strength", *passim*.

¹⁰⁵ Darr, "No Strength", p. 227.

¹⁰⁶ Darr, "No Strength", p. 231.

unfortunate women.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the exact correlation, the importance of the proverb is that it shows the powerlessness of Hezekiah in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances. The humble and openhearted attitude conveyed by Hezekiah's words indicate the possible prerequisites for faith as it is conceived of in these narratives.

Hezekiah tentatively asks for help (19:4) on the basis of God's honour that YHWH might rebuke (יָכַח; the same root as in v.3) the Assyrian because of the way he has ridiculed the living God. In this plea to Isaiah the deity is described as "the LORD your God" twice. The use of both name and title may indicate that this is a formal situation that exceeds personal concerns;¹⁰⁸ the inclusion of the name is appropriate since Isaiah's relationship with YHWH is assumed. The use of the second person singular pronoun suggests deference to Isaiah on the part of Hezekiah, which is apposite as Isaiah is a prophet, a representative of God. The king of Assyria has mocked (חָרַץ) the living God.¹⁰⁹ The name YHWH is not used here as the emphasis is on God's role. He is designated the *living* God (אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים) in Hezekiah's message probably to distinguish him from the gods of other nations who have patently failed to deliver their devotees (cf. 18:34-35). Hezekiah's request is not so much for protection as for punishment upon Sennacherib for his blasphemy. "Hezekiah passes the challenge to the honour of YHWH on to YHWH himself."¹¹⁰ Hezekiah also requests prayer for the remnant that survives.¹¹¹ This probably refers to Jerusalem as the one city in Judah that has so far remained uncaptured by the Assyrians.

The response of Isaiah includes an oracle of assurance in 19:6; Hezekiah is told not to be afraid.¹¹² Sennacherib's officials are designated as נְעָרִים, a term that may be used to belittle them and the threat they represent. The

¹⁰⁷ Darr, "No Strength", p. 244.

¹⁰⁸ Revell, *Designation*, p. 215.

¹⁰⁹ On חָרַץ see pp. 89-91 below

¹¹⁰ Botha, "Etiquette", p. 42.

¹¹¹ There is a semantic link with Isa. 7 where Isaiah's son is named Shear-Jashub.

usual term for ministers of a king is עֲבָדִים, which is used of Hezekiah's officials in the previous verse (19:5).¹¹³ The narrative, which follows in 19:8-9a, indicates a turning point in the plot. Sennacherib has left Lachish and the Rabshakeh has withdrawn from Jerusalem. It seems that Hezekiah's dependence upon YHWH has already begun to be rewarded. Yet, through the ambiguity of a Hebrew verb, tension rises again. Just when we expect to read "And when the king heard ... he returned (שׁוּב) home", the narrator states, "And when the king heard ... he sent messengers again (שׁוּב) to Hezekiah."¹¹⁴

(וַיִּשְׁמַע ... וַיֵּשֶׁב וַיִּשְׁלַח מַלְאָכִים אֶל-חֶזְקִיָּהוּ)

Verse 9b is of interest to source critics as it has often been supposed that it marks the beginning of a new source (B2). (There is a space break in the middle of v.9 in the MT.)¹¹⁶ One of the reasons proffered in favour of this thesis is that the message of Sennacherib (19:10-13) is a repetition of his previous message (18:30, 32-33). Yet, the recipient of the message is different. Whereas previously the Rabshakeh tried to alienate the people from their God, now he attempts to do the same with Hezekiah. Thus, several scholars now prefer a unified literary reading.¹¹⁷ For example, Beuken reckons that this section forms a climax, and can be seen as a progression from the previous message.¹¹⁸

The third message from Sennacherib is in the form of a letter. Fewell argues that this indicates that the threat has lessened considerably and that

¹¹² Cf. the counsel that was given to Ahaz in Isa. 7:4

¹¹³ Revell, *Designation*, p. 33. This is debatable, however. Hobbs (*2 Kings*, p. 275) following J. MacDonald ("The Status and Role of the *Na'ar* in Israelite Society", *JNES* 35 [1976], pp. 147-170) argues that נַעַר is not a term of derogation.

¹¹⁴ R.D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Interpretation; Louisville: John Knox Press, 1987), p. 239.

¹¹⁵ This verb is missing in Isa. 37:9, but וַיִּשְׁמַע appears instead. Some scholars feel that וַיֵּשֶׁב should be omitted in 2 Kgs 19:9 on text-critical grounds. See, for example, Campbell, *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 196-197 n. 95 and further references there.

¹¹⁶ Cohn (*2 Kings*, p. 135) suggests, "The break signals the end of the battlefield report and the return to the main topic, a second deputation to Hezekiah in Jerusalem, this time by anonymous messengers."

¹¹⁷ See note 2 above for references.

¹¹⁸ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 361.

Hezekiah's response signifies a lack of panic.¹¹⁹ Although a letter may not have appeared as immediately threatening as an army encamped near the city, it suggested that the threat had not yet passed and that the Assyrians were not going to forget about Jerusalem. The attitude of the Assyrian appears more belligerent and his language more forceful than in the previous speeches. Possibly, he feels a greater urgency because of the mobilization of Ethiopia against Assyria.¹²⁰ The tension is heightened again. Beuken commenting on the version in Isa. 37, states, "The pretension of Assyrian supremacy is even stronger: 'the kings of Assyria' (v. 11: plural) and 'my fathers' (v. 12) instead of 'the king of Assyria' (36:18, 20: singular) and 'my hand' (36:19f.); 'all the lands' (v. 11) instead of 'his, these, their land(s)' (36:18, 20). The threat itself is similarly more acute, 'destroying them utterly' (v. 11)¹²¹ having no counterpart in the previous address."¹²² Key words such as בְּטַח (v. 10) and נִצַּל (vv. 11-12) again appear, and, thus, link this message with the two speeches previously made, but the expansions just noted make it far more than a repetition of 18:33-35.¹²³ It also differs from the first two speeches in being directly addressed to Hezekiah and focusing more on the character of YHWH. Hezekiah is warned not to let his god, whom he trusts (בְּטַח), deceive him, when he says Jerusalem will not be given into the Assyrian's hand. Sennacherib demands to know (vv. 11b-12a), "And shall you be delivered (נִצַּל)? Have the gods of the nations delivered (נִצַּל) them?" Again, the irony of the situation is evident; even YHWH is accused of deception by Sennacherib, who tries to separate Hezekiah from his God (v. 10).¹²⁴ The last verse of this section (v. 13) focuses on the powerlessness of other kings to withstand Sennacherib: "Where is the king of Hamath, the king of Arpad, the king of the city of Sepharvaim, the king of Hena or the king of Ivvah?" The question that this raises is "What about the *king* of Jerusalem? Will he meet the same fate as the other

¹¹⁹ Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat", p. 82.

¹²⁰ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 291.

¹²¹ The verse numbers are the same for this section in both 2 Kgs 19 and Isa. 37.

¹²² Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 361.

¹²³ Olley, "Trust", p. 65 n. 28.

kings?"¹²⁵ Attention is again drawn to Hezekiah and what he will do.

19:14-19

The second reaction of Hezekiah follows in vv. 14-19 where he goes into the temple and spreads out the letter before YHWH. It is not clear that Hezekiah's actions need to be construed as following ancient Mesopotamian practice as some commentators suggest,¹²⁶ but the spreading out of the letter, presumably with his hands, is probably symbolic of a prayerful attitude.¹²⁷ This time the king of Judah prays to God personally and directly. Reading the prayer as a development within the narrative (rather than as the work of a different author)¹²⁸ Hezekiah's direct approach to YHWH rather than to YHWH's prophet suggests a change of attitude on Hezekiah's part. The reader is probably meant to notice an increase in faith, a greater confidence, even boldness in approaching God. He is not afraid to use five imperatives to beg YHWH to act. He should incline (הִטָּה), hear (וּשְׁמָע), open (פָּקַח), see (וּרְאֵה), and hear (וּשְׁמָע). The five verbs used closely together give a sense of urgency.

Attention has been drawn to the importance of royal prayers within the Deuteronomistic History.¹²⁹ Apart from the prayers of Hezekiah, (here and in 2 Kgs 20:3) the only prayers found on the lips of kings in the Deuteronomistic History are those of David in 2 Samuel 7:18-29 and Solomon in 1 Kings 8:23-53. The divine covenant with David and his dynasty in 2 Sam. 7 and the dedication of Solomon's temple are clearly

¹²⁴ Smelik, *Converting*, p. 117.

¹²⁵ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 250.

¹²⁶ Kaiser (*Isaiah 13-39*, p. 393), among others, sees a similarity between Hezekiah's action and the ancient Mesopotamian practice of reading out and depositing letters in a temple after a victorious campaign. However, such letters were addressed to a god, not the enemy and they were deposited when victory had been secured, not before it.

¹²⁷ The same verb (שָׁרַף) is used of stretching out hands in prayer or worship. Cf. Ex. 9:29, 33; 1 Kgs 8:38; 2 Chron. 6:29; Ezr. 9:5; Job 11:13; Ps. 44:21.

¹²⁸ See Smelik, *Converting*, p. 119 n. 91.

¹²⁹ See Richard L. Pratt, *Royal Prayer and the Chronicler's Program* (unpublished PhD thesis; Cambridge, MA: Harvard Divinity School, 1987); Stephen L. McKenzie, *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Books of Kings in the Deuteronomistic*

important events in the history of the relationship between YHWH and Israel. It might be argued that Hezekiah's prayers are not on the same level of importance as the other two, but the inclusion of the prayer here "... strengthens the theological interpretation relating to the situation described."¹³⁰ The prayer of David comes at a climactic point in his life after he has brought the ark into Jerusalem and has received the promises from God through Nathan, not only regarding his own reign, but that of his descendants. This oracle reaches its acme with the promise: "your throne shall be established forever." (2 Sam. 7:16). The connection with the temple should be noted, for the oracle through Nathan comes in response to David's ambition to build a house for God and is considered by Pratt to be a crucial moment in the history of monarchy and cult.¹³¹ Solomon's prayer is offered at another defining moment, the dedication of the temple.¹³² Consequently, the recording of Hezekiah's prayer in that same temple probably indicates something significant. The Assyrians have threatened the stability of the Solomonic era; both king and temple are in peril. Yet YHWH intervenes in direct response to Hezekiah's prayer at what is arguably another critical point in the history of the monarchy and cult.¹³³ Pratt draws attention to divine activities that are anticipated in Solomon's prayer and realized in Hezekiah's prayer.¹³⁴ Pratt has conveniently listed several connections between the prayers of Hezekiah and Solomon.¹³⁵ The first, the link with the temple, which Solomon prayed would become a house of prayer (1 Kgs. 8:27-53), has been mentioned above. Secondly, Hezekiah faces the threat of a siege, one of the situations envisaged by Solomon (1 Kgs. 8:37). Thirdly, the imagery of YHWH opening his eyes and seeing is found in both prayers

History (VTSup, 42; Leiden: Brill, 1991), p. 109; Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 284.

¹³⁰ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 284.

¹³¹ See Pratt, *Prayer*, p. 79.

¹³² Samuel E. Balentine (*Prayer in the Hebrew Bible* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993], p. 80) goes so far as to "suggest that prayer may serve as a defining characteristic of a place rather than a person." Solomon's prayer is considered by Balentine to be "... a prayer about the temple as the pre-eminent place of prayer" (p. 81).

¹³³ Pratt, *Prayer*, p. 80.

¹³⁴ Pratt, *Prayer*, p. 82.

¹³⁵ Pratt, *Prayer*, pp. 85-87. McKenzie (*Trouble with Kings*, p. 109) also records a similar list as given by Pratt in an unpublished paper: *The Incomparability of Hezekiah in the Deuteronomistic History* (1982), pp. 13-20.

(1 Kgs 8:29, 52; Isa. 37:17). Pratt also mentions the desire that all nations will acknowledge the uniqueness of YHWH (1 Kgs 8:43, 60; Isa. 37:20).¹³⁶ Hezekiah is depicted through his prayer as a true and faithful descendant of David, a king loyal to God, who knows how to pray on the basis of the Davidic covenant and in line with the expectations of Solomon, and who is rewarded with the deliverance of Jerusalem, because of his praying and faithfulness. With the possible exception of Josiah, the great reformer, Hezekiah is portrayed as a king set apart.

The statements made in the prayer are indicative of Hezekiah's theological understanding and may even be said to offer a delineation of the divine character itself.¹³⁷ In the Isaianic version, Hezekiah addresses God as "LORD of hosts" (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) (Isa. 37:16).¹³⁸ Yet, he is also "God of Israel", a title that suggests "solidarity with his people".¹³⁹ YHWH is viewed by Hezekiah as sitting upon or between the cherubim (יֹשֵׁב הַכְרֻבִּים), which suggests a throne. Pictorial representations of cherubim thrones from the ancient Near East have been adduced as evidence of this.¹⁴⁰ That the phrase indicates divine kingship may be inferred from several passages including Jer. 46:18; 48:15; 51:57; Ps. 24:10; 48:9; and Isa. 6:5. When Hezekiah addresses God as "LORD of Hosts, God of Israel, who is enthroned upon the cherubim", he may well be indicating YHWH's kingship and making a deliberate contrast between the heavenly king and the great king of Assyria.¹⁴¹

The superiority of YHWH over Sennacherib is clearly delineated in the

¹³⁶ See below for a fuller discussion of this point.

¹³⁷ Balentine (*Prayer*, pp. 48-50, 89-91) has discussed the use of prayers as a means of building character portraits.

¹³⁸ The word צְבָאוֹת is lacking in the parallel passage in 2 Kgs. 19:15. On 2 Kgs 19: 31 see below. See T. N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1982), p. 52, where he draws attention to the comparative abundance of the references to the Sabaoth designation in Isa. 1-39 compared with the Deuteronomistic History.

¹³⁹ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 362.

¹⁴⁰ T. N. D. Mettinger, "YHWH Sabaoth - The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne", in T. Ishida (ed.), *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1982) pp. 109-138 (113-116). See also Mettinger, *Dethronement*, pp. 19-37.

rest of v. 15 where God is described as the creator of heaven and earth. The statement in v. 15 that YHWH is God alone of all the kingdoms of the earth is reflected in v. 20: “that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD.” This *inclusio* reflects a main concern in the prayer.¹⁴² The desire is that all the kingdoms of the world should come to know what is already the case, but is only recognized as such by Israel. The uniqueness of YHWH is typical of Deuteronomic language, as may be seen by comparing these verses with Deut. 4:35, 39.¹⁴³ YHWH is recognized not only as the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, but also as the creator of heaven and earth and the God who is over all the kingdoms of the earth. In contrast, the gods of the nations have been hurled into the fire by the Assyrians, because they are not gods.¹⁴⁴ They are the work of human hands, not makers of anything themselves.¹⁴⁵ They clearly cannot “see” and “hear” as Hezekiah is requesting YHWH to do. This is the retort to the taunts of Sennacherib regarding the inability of other nations and their gods to resist Assyrian oppression. Hezekiah is portrayed as believing in a universal God who is sovereign over all nations, which includes Assyria.

The Verb חָרַף

In 19:16, Hezekiah calls on God to hear the words with which Sennacherib has *mocked* the living God. Hezekiah argues that YHWH has been shamed. That shaming is brought to YHWH’s attention, as is the solution. YHWH must save Jerusalem to restore his honour among the people of YHWH and the kingdoms of the earth.¹⁴⁶ Hezekiah condescendingly names Sennacherib without his title.¹⁴⁷ The term חָרַף is

¹⁴¹ Mettinger, *YHWH Sabaoth*, p. 118. See also Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 362.

¹⁴² Pratt, *Prayer*, p. 87.

¹⁴³ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 331.

¹⁴⁴ This may not reflect normal Assyrian practice. Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 236) state, “Usually the gods of the conquered nations were treated with respect, for the Assyrians held that the gods abandoned their followers, thus handing them over to the conqueror.”

¹⁴⁵ See Balentine, *Prayer*, p. 94.

¹⁴⁶ Lyn M. Bechtel, “The Perception of Shame within the Divine-Human Relationship in Biblical Israel”, in Lewis M. Hopfe (ed.), *Uncovering Ancient Stones* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), pp. 79-92 (88).

¹⁴⁷ Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 136.

found four times in this chapter (see also 19:4, 22, 23 [Isa. 37:4, 23, 24]). By his disparagement of God, Sennacherib is trying to boost his own standing and emphasize his own greatness.¹⁴⁸ Sennacherib is depicted as “an archetypal blasphemer” in the words of Long.¹⁴⁹ He has boasted of his victories over other nations and their gods; YHWH is treated as if no better or stronger than these are.

The other major passage in the Old Testament where this word appears as a motif is 1 Samuel 17. There the champion of the Philistines, Goliath, has challenged Israel to put forward their representative to engage in single combat with him (v. 10). It is a story that clearly emphasizes that the young David is a man of faith. As with Sennacherib, there is the implication that Goliath is self-assured of his position. He disdains David because of his youth and curses him by his gods. Again, the contest upon the human field of battle is depicted as a shadow of the spiritual contest between YHWH and foreign gods. Goliath himself first uses the word, *חָרַף*, when he issues his challenge in v. 10 and defies the ranks of Israel. The words of the Israelites in v. 25 confirm that “he has come up to defy (*חָרַף*) Israel.” Defiance is met with dismay by Saul and Israel until David comes along. David, when enquiring about the reward for killing the Philistine, speaks of the challenge as a “reproach” (*חֲרִיפָה*), for Goliath is defying (*חָרַף*) the armies of the living God (v. 26; cf. v. 36). David asserts his faith in the LORD both to Saul (v. 36) and to Goliath (vv. 45-47). Although Goliath never mentions YHWH, defiance of God’s army is tantamount to defiance of YHWH himself. God’s honour is considered to be at stake, not just the reputation of the Israelite army.

חָרַף and its parallel, *גָּזַף*,¹⁵⁰ are also found in Psalm 44, where the psalmist laments defeat in battle and the apparent inaction of God, even

¹⁴⁸ E. Kutsch, “*חָרַף* II”, *TDOT*, V, pp. 209-215 (211-212).

¹⁴⁹ Long, *2 Kings*, p. 226. Gonçalves (*L'expédition*, pp. 420-423), however, questions the translation of *חָרַף* by *blasphémer*. He argues that contempt for YHWH does not necessarily deny the power of YHWH.

¹⁵⁰ This word is found in 2 Kgs 19:6, 22.

though the people have kept the covenant. The words of those who taunt and revile induce a sense of shame (vv. 16f.). If there is this sense of disgrace for the psalmist, it is not surprising that reviling of God's name produces an unbearable burden for a David or a Hezekiah. Hezekiah's opinion of Sennacherib both here (v.17) and previously in v.4 is confirmed by YHWH through Isaiah in v. 6 and in vv. 22-24.¹⁵¹

Another term which might well be applied to the Assyrian king is "fool" (נָבֵל). Although this word is not found in the narrative, Sennacherib fulfils many of the characteristics attributed to the "fool" in the Hebrew Bible. The connection between a fool and one who blasphemes is delineated in Psalm 74:22: "Arise, O God, contend for your cause; remember your reproaches (חֲרָפֹתַי) that issue from the foolish (נָבֵל) all the day!" (own translation) Compare also v. 18 in the same psalm: "Remember this, O LORD, an enemy scoffs (חָרַךְ), and a foolish people (עַם נָבֵל) reviles your name (own translation)." In the story of Nabal and Abigail, David blesses the Lord after the death of Nabal, because God "... who has avenged the insult (חֲרָפָתִי) I received at the hand of Nabal" (1 Sam. 25:39). The autonomous way in which Sennacherib and the Assyrian empire act without any deference to YHWH is again in keeping with the concept of a נָבֵל. Sennacherib is portrayed as though he were not accountable to anyone else or to any moral principle. He acts as if YHWH does not exist or is inferior (Cf. Psa. 14:1 and 53:2). Sennacherib's autonomy is underlined by the boastful claims attributed to him in vv. 24-25. Whereas Hezekiah has learned to say "thou" (v.16 and v. 20) and thus found salvation, Sennacherib can only say "I" and comes to death.¹⁵²

The prayer shows a further development compared with the king's earlier message to Isaiah. There Hezekiah was expressing a hope that the

¹⁵¹ Long, *2 Kings*, p. 226.

¹⁵² Walter Brueggemann, *2 Kings* (Knox Preaching Guide; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 78.

Rabshakeh might be rebuked and asked for prayer for the remnant. Now Hezekiah's own prayer verbalizes his desire, not only that God will hear the rebukes of Sennacherib, but specifically that he will deliver them from his hand. Beuken notes that Hezekiah uses the word *hiphil* of *יָשַׁע*, which is used many times in the book of Isaiah of God's salvific action, whereas the Assyrian employs the *hiphil* of *נָצַל* (to deliver),¹⁵³ although God is shown using the latter in 2 Kgs 20:6/Isa. 38:6. This final petition of v. 19 is introduced by *וְעַתָּה*, a device which may indicate a move to a specific request from preliminary overtures.¹⁵⁴ Hezekiah concludes his petition by referring again to YHWH and praying that all kingdoms may recognize that he alone is God. The prayer, as Balentine notes,¹⁵⁵ has been written to show that YHWH and YHWH alone can be relied upon to bring deliverance. The repetition of the divine name emphasizes this. Hezekiah goes to YHWH's house, spreads out the letter before YHWH, prays to YHWH and invokes his name at the beginning of his prayer (19:15a). The Tetragrammaton is then invoked a further five times in the prayer in verses 16-19.

Verse 19 brings the prayer to a climax, proclaiming the aspiration that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that YHWH alone is God. The concept of the statement of recognition, found in various forms in the Old Testament, has been thoroughly investigated by Zimmerli, though mainly from a form critical viewpoint.¹⁵⁶ A good example of its use may be found in Exodus ch. 6, where God speaks directly to Moses, declaring that he is YHWH; in Ex. 6:6-8 Moses is commanded to proclaim to the people of Israel that God is YHWH. In the midst of a series of verbs in the first person, which delineate the acts that God will perform on Israel's behalf, is the statement: "You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians." Here, and consistently throughout its usage in the Old Testament, the knowledge of YHWH is

¹⁵³ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 363.

¹⁵⁴ Balentine, *Prayer*, p. 94. See also p. 58 n. 21.

¹⁵⁵ Balentine, *Prayer*, p. 92.

¹⁵⁶ See W. Zimmerli, "Knowledge of God according to the Book of Ezekiel" in *I Am*

not considered to be a process or product of human speculation or self-examination. God himself is active wherever the statement of recognition is used. Zimmerli argues, "The first condition for knowledge of Yahweh is that Yahweh act. This cannot be humanly invoked; it can only be requested."¹⁵⁷ However, the actions of God may be interpreted as salvatory or penal depending on one's viewpoint. The plagues, for example, in the book of Exodus are seen as signs of God's judgment on the Egyptians, but as signs of deliverance for Israel, because of the resultant exodus of God's people. Hezekiah's petition is for salvation from the hand of Assyria. What is deliverance for the Judahites will, we know from the conclusion of the story, mean judgement on the Assyrians.

It should also be noted that God desires to be recognized not only by his own people, but also by other nations such as Egypt. Thus in Ex. 9:14 YHWH states: "For this time I will send all my plagues upon your heart, and upon your servants and your people, that you may know that there is none like me in all the earth." Hezekiah is using a strong argument that finds a precedent in Israel's greatest deliverance in her tradition.¹⁵⁸ Rendtorff has also discussed the principle that God's actions precipitate the knowledge of God.¹⁵⁹ It is noteworthy that he quotes Ex. 14:31, which does not include the root יָדָע. Rather the reaction of the people is indicated by יָדָע and the hiphil of יָדָע. This is probably correct. They are all examples of a proper human response to God in the Hebrew bible. It is anachronistic to read a modern, post-enlightenment distinction between knowing and believing into an ancient text. It is unlikely that a believer in ancient Israel would sharply differentiate between the two.¹⁶⁰

Yahweh (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), pp. 29-98.

¹⁵⁷ Zimmerli, "Knowledge of God", p. 64.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. also 1 Kgs 8:41-43.

¹⁵⁹ See Rolf Rendtorff, "The Concept of Revelation in Ancient Israel" in Wolfhart Pannenberg (ed.), *Revelation as History* (trans. of 3rd edn; London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), pp. 23-53.

¹⁶⁰ L. Kolakowski (*Religion* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1982], pp. 174-5) has observed that in the realm of the Sacred "...the moral and the cognitive aspects of the act

19:20-28

Hezekiah's prayer is answered by a lengthy oracle from YHWH given through Isaiah. For the remainder of the story YHWH is "the dominant character",¹⁶¹ although what YHWH states about Sennacherib will also confirm and amplify the characterization of the Assyrian king. A similar movement from suppliant to YHWH may be noted in Exodus 33-34, where the intercession of Moses is answered at length by YHWH who quickly proceeds to dominate the conversation. However, in that passage there is no intermediary, as YHWH is said to speak to Moses face to face (Ex. 33:11). In 2 Kgs 19 the different characters have had their say, but now "fade out" as YHWH takes centre stage. On a much grander scale in the book of Job, Job and his comforters are given considerable scope to speak their minds until YHWH answers from the whirlwind. The remaining words of Job are few and very respectful. Similarly, here YHWH asserts his authority. He makes it clear that he is able to control and subdue the Assyrians.

The first point to note at the beginning of the oracle is that YHWH's words are given in direct response to the prayer of Hezekiah (19:20). Hezekiah's prayer is acknowledged by YHWH, implying a favourable response.¹⁶² In particular, the plea of v. 16 that YHWH would incline his ears and hear (שמע), and open his eyes and see (ראה), has been answered. Comparison might be drawn with Ex. 2:23-25, where God hears (שמע) the cries of the Hebrew slaves and looks (ראה) upon them. Compare also Ex. 3:7-9 where YHWH declares that he acknowledges the oppression and suffering of the Israelites. This is followed in 3:10 by God's commissioning of Moses to go to Pharaoh to bring his people out of Egypt. Moses then begins to list his excuses. In the Hezekiah narrative, however, there is not the same "face-to-face" encounter with YHWH; the

of perception are so blended that they are indistinguishable from each other: only an analysis 'from outside' produces this distinction... It is not the case that the believer separately 'knows' that God is Creator and concludes that he ought to obey him (such reasoning being logically illicit, anyway): he 'knows' both in an act of acceptance."

¹⁶¹ Fewell, "Sennacherib's Defeat", p. 82.

¹⁶² Long, *2 Kings*, p.227.

words of YHWH are delivered in the form of an oracle through Isaiah and so there is no opportunity for Hezekiah or anyone else to speak.

This apparent direct response of YHWH to prayer raises the interesting question, as Webb notes, as to who is in control, Hezekiah or YHWH.¹⁶³ Yet there can be little doubt in this regard when the passage concerning Sennacherib is read (37:26-28). If God is in control of the arrogant blasphemer, he is also to be seen as master of his own protégé. There is not space to discuss the theology of prayer, or, indeed, freedom of the human will versus divine sovereignty. That sometimes God's will may seem to be delayed or executed in an unexpected way is evident in the Hebrew Bible,¹⁶⁴ but that is not the point here. Hezekiah is seen to pray and God is shown as responding to that prayer. Hypothetical questions as to whether God might have intervened without Hezekiah's petition are not the immediate concern. Comparison might be made to Jer. 18: 7-10, where God indicates his willingness to change his mind, if people turn from evil when threatened with judgment or, if they do evil when God has promised blessing. Freedom is not being denied to God. Indeed, he is totally free. Yet he does not arbitrarily exercise power, but acts morally in relationship with and in response to his people.

Hezekiah's plea for YHWH to see and hear is not just a general petition for help, but in particular, in 19:16 it is the words of mockery, which Hezekiah implores YHWH to hear. It is mockery against the living God. Clearly, the blasphemy has been heard, for God asks rhetorical questions of Assyria. Assyria has treated YHWH as if he is like any of the other gods of the nations, but she will soon be faced with the true nature of her opponent. Assyria is confronted with the fact that she has mocked the Holy One of Israel. Assyria, who has treated YHWH as though just another god, will find that she is treated by YHWH as just another nation. As Brueggemann maintains, "The mocking done by the empire was in

¹⁶³ Webb, *Isaiah*, p. 152.

¹⁶⁴ For example, consider the apparent failure of Elijah to carry out the anointing of Hazael and Jehu (1 Kgs 19:15-16). Yet Elisha tells Hazael that he will be king of Syria

order to claim absoluteness. It is an absolute claim with which Hezekiah could not cope and which Yahweh will not tolerate.”¹⁶⁵

In 19:21-28 it is YHWH who taunts, mocks and threatens. Several terms are used by YHWH that indicate a challenge to someone's honour. Sennacherib, the arrogant aggressor, has now “met” more than his match, although he himself probably never heard or read these words. It is an oracle “concerning” or “against” (עָלָיו; 19:21) Sennacherib, but it is given to Hezekiah for his benefit as an answer to his prayer and as an encouragement to his faith. The Jerusalemmites needed to hear that brute force is not the only factor that matters in international affairs.¹⁶⁶ The Assyrian king's challenge was originally to Hezekiah, but it is YHWH with whom he must ultimately deal. “Yahweh joins word-battle with Sennacherib, but it is a battle waged entirely within the reader's consciousness.”¹⁶⁷ Verse 21 shows the contrast between the great empire and little Judah, which is pictured as a young woman. Possibly, this makes the taunt even more derogatory in an ancient Near Eastern context.¹⁶⁸ The image of the city as a woman is found in several places in the book of Isaiah including ch. 1, where Jerusalem is described both as a virgin (1:8), but also as a whore (1:21). As Schmitt puts it, “... the two images of the whore and daughter set the stage for the rest of Isaiah 1-39.”¹⁶⁹ However, it is the picture of the virgin daughter that is found in 2 Kgs 19:21 (Isa. 37:22). As in Isa. 10:32, the daughter is mentioned when the city is under the threat of attack.¹⁷⁰ The use of such imagery may be intended to emphasize God's protective attitude towards the city, which is recognized as the main stage for the worship of YHWH. Again, the *hubris* of Sennacherib is being challenged, as he is faced with the

(2 Kgs 8:13) and he anoints Jehu as king over Israel (2 Kgs 9:6).

¹⁶⁵ Walter Brueggemann, “Isaiah 37:21-29: The Transformative Potential of a Public Metaphor”, *HBT* 10 (1988), pp. 1-32 (9).

¹⁶⁶ Gowan, *Humanism and Hybris*, p. 37.

¹⁶⁷ Long, *2 Kings*, p. 228.

¹⁶⁸ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 394.

¹⁶⁹ John J. Schmitt, “The City as a Woman in Isaiah 1-39”, in Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah Volume 1* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 95-119 (98).

¹⁷⁰ Schmitt, “City as a Woman”, p. 101.

consideration that Jerusalem, although apparently vulnerable, is under the protection of the God whom the Assyrian refuses to acknowledge. She may be vulnerable, yet this virgin is not without spirit: "she tosses her head". The advances of Assyria are scorned and despised by the daughter of Zion/Jerusalem. She is now retaliating in a similar way to that of Assyria, but as Brueggemann notes: "Israel does not voice its scorn until it can be put in the more formidable mouth of Yahweh."¹⁷¹

Just as Sennacherib has mocked and raised his voice, so Zion scorns Assyria. God himself now turns on Sennacherib, demanding to know in the form of rhetorical questions, whom the Assyrian has mocked. The questions and answers in vv. 22-23a again indicate the characterization of Sennacherib. Between the first line of v. 22 and that of v. 23, which both use the verb הָרַף, the root רָם is used twice. As Long notes, the figurative sense of the latter is "to be lifted up in arrogance."¹⁷² This arrogance is apparent in the list of accomplishments claimed by Sennacherib in vv. 23-24. The first person style is reminiscent of ancient Near Eastern monuments,¹⁷³ yet in this context must be viewed ironically as the idle boasting of an arrogant aggressor.¹⁷⁴ Wildberger notes the similarity between the language of v. 23 and that of Isa. 14.¹⁷⁵ The king of Babylon was also noted for his felling of cedars and cypresses (Isa. 14:8), yet he is laid low. Nielsen posits the view that Sennacherib is behaving as only YHWH may, because she understands the narrative to be about the garden of Lebanon, which belongs to YHWH.¹⁷⁶ Having climbed the highest mountains, the Assyrian king goes down into the earth digging wells. He extravagantly claims to have dried up the streams of

¹⁷¹ Brueggemann, "Public Metaphor", p. 7.

¹⁷² Long, *2 Kings*, p. 229. Cf. Deut. 8:14.

¹⁷³ Note emphatic the use of the first person pronoun, אֲנִי, in vv. 23-24.

¹⁷⁴ Long, *2 Kings*, p. 229.

¹⁷⁵ Hans Wildberger, *Jesaja 28-39*, (BKAT, 10.3; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener-Verlag, 1982), p. 1432. See also Ronald E. Clements, "Isaiah 14, 22-27: A Central Passage Reconsidered", in Jacques Vermeylen (ed.), *The Book of Isaiah/Le Livre D'Isaïe* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), pp. 253-262 (259-262).

¹⁷⁶ Kirsten Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree: The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah* (JSOTSup, 65; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), p.172; also cf. pp. 166, 168.

Egypt (2 Kgs 19:24),¹⁷⁷ which are God's work (cf. Isa. 51:10).¹⁷⁸ Possibly, he is claiming a miracle like the one YHWH performed at the Reed Sea.¹⁷⁹ Claims, which might normally be reckoned awe-inspiring, are used as further illustration of arrogant blasphemy. As Childs notes, there does not have to be a direct profaning of YHWH, for the words of an enemy to be considered as blasphemy attracting the judgment of God. He cites several examples of nations and kings whose words of self-aggrandizement and pride are considered sufficient to invoke God's wrath such as Ezek. 35: 10-15.¹⁸⁰ However, with regard to the boasting of Sennacherib, Isa. 10 is particularly relevant. Just as Sennacherib brags of all his accomplishments, so Assyria boasts, "Are not my commanders all kings?" (v. 8). The sin again is not direct blasphemy against YHWH, but an arrogant boasting that is interpreted by the prophet as defiance illustrated in terms of tools such as the axe or the saw that vaunt themselves against their users.¹⁸¹

God's abrupt rejoinder to Sennacherib follows in vv. 25-28. Sennacherib has stated, "Behold, you have heard..." (19:11), but now YHWH confronts him with the question, "Have you not heard...?" (19:25). God declares that he has manipulated him, being fully cognisant of his every move, and will send him back the way that he has come. The supposed accomplishments of Sennacherib are asserted to be what God had long ordained. Here is the answer to the Rabshakeh's and Sennacherib's attempts to weaken trust in YHWH. Even the examples of past conquest quoted boastfully by Sennacherib (19:11-13) are claimed by YHWH as part of a divine plan. It is interesting to compare what Sennacherib has claimed in 19:23-24 with what God says about his actions. Some of

¹⁷⁷ Understanding מִצְרַיִם to refer to Egypt. See Burney, *Notes*, pp. 345-346; James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951), p. 504; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 268.

¹⁷⁸ Miscall, *Isaiah*, p. 91. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, p. 396.

¹⁷⁹ Nelson, *Kings*, p. 240.

¹⁸⁰ Childs, *Assyrian Crisis*, pp. 88-89.

¹⁸¹ Childs, *Assyrian Crisis*, p. 89.

Sennacherib's boasts are clearly fanciful, but, significantly, all are to do with the domination of nature.¹⁸² He seeks to elevate himself to a divinity. YHWH emphasizes that he is in control of creation by using verbs that allude to creative activity: *יָצַר עֲשָׂה* and the hiphil of *בָּרָא* (19:25).¹⁸³ God, on the other hand, makes a more realistic statement when he describes the devastation of fortified cities and the dismay and confusion of their inhabitants. Nielsen interprets the felling of cedars and cypresses of v. 23 as symbolizing the destruction of cities and people (cf. v. 26),¹⁸⁴ but the imagery may be being used more as a contrast. Godlike feats of strength are contrasted with the more mundane efforts of a dictator, the demolishing of cities and terrorizing of inhabitants. Compared with felling the great trees of Lebanon, the Assyrian is only good at bringing down feeble wild plants and scrawny grass. The difference between Sennacherib and YHWH is also very evident. Sennacherib is concerned to magnify himself by his arrogant boasts; YHWH describes the reality of the situation and the condition of the victims of Sennacherib's aggression. Sennacherib is concerned with claiming wonders of nature. God is characterized as showing concern for his highest creation, humankind, which in comparison to the trees mentioned by Sennacherib, seems as ephemeral and vulnerable as grass.

God knows all about Sennacherib (v. 27), but this is clearly not meant in a caring, providential way as in Ps. 121 or Ps. 139, where the Psalmist welcomes God's intrusion and intervention, because he eschews evil and seeks righteousness. Sennacherib would no doubt wish that his movements, including his military strategies¹⁸⁵ and his raging against God, were not known to God. For God threatens punishment, because of his raging and arrogance (*שִׁאֲנָן*). Sennacherib is to be treated in the way he has treated many others, possibly as a prisoner of war (cf. Ezek

¹⁸² Ellul, *Politics*, p. 173.

¹⁸³ Long, (*2 Kings*, p. 230) draws attention to the similarity between vv. 24-25 and Isa. 40:21-24, 28-31; 48:6-8, which emphasize the power of God as creator.

¹⁸⁴ Nielsen, *There is Hope*, p. 173. For the significance of the imagery compare Isa. 2:12-19.

¹⁸⁵ This assumes this is what is meant by "going out and coming in".

38:4),¹⁸⁶ or even as an animal (cf. Ezek. 19:4; Job 41:1). The comparison with Leviathan in Job 41 may be particularly apposite, as Leviathan is described as “king over all that are proud” (Job 41:26).¹⁸⁷ He will be led home with the help of a hook in his nose and a bit in his mouth.

19:29-34

The sign that is mentioned in vv. 29-31 may not appear to be miraculous or out of the ordinary.¹⁸⁸ Yet signs are often found in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible as confirmations of faith.¹⁸⁹ Here, in Hasel’s words, the sign “... serves as guarantee for the predicted departure of Sennacherib in order to encourage, support, and assure Hezekiah that the time of hardship is past.”¹⁹⁰ The agricultural theme fits well with the rest of the narrative in 2 Kgs 18-19.¹⁹¹ Those that faced starvation because of a siege and were tempted to surrender to Assyria by being bribed with the offer of fig trees and vines, are now promised two years of effortless harvest. Again, YHWH proves that he can match and surpass whatever Sennacherib has offered. It was at the place of the aqueduct that the Rabshakeh threatened death in effect, if they would not yield to him, or life, if they would. YHWH is now seen as the life-giver, the creator, whereas Sennacherib is the usurper. The mention of “remnant” (root שָׁרָא) in vv. 30-31 is a reminder of Hezekiah’s request for prayer in 19:4. Like the vine, the remnant will take root and bear fruit.¹⁹² What counts is the zeal, the

¹⁸⁶ Long, *2 Kings*, p. 231.

¹⁸⁷ Sawyer, *Isaiah Vol. II*, p. 32.

¹⁸⁸ Yet, it may be debated as to what is normal in Hezekiah’s day. John Goldingay (*Isaiah* [NIBC 13; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson; Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001], p. 213) says, “We would call it a return to normality, but actually normality is...” and he continues with a quote from Ellul (*Politics*, p. 178) “... war and murder, famine and pollution, accident and disruption.”

¹⁸⁹ The following might be cited as examples: The three signs given to Moses in Ex. 4:1-9; the plagues of Egypt in Ex. 10:1-2; Gideon’s fleece in Judg. 6:36-40.

¹⁹⁰ Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah* (AUMSR, 5; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrew University Press, 3rd edn, 1980), p. 334.

¹⁹¹ Fewell, “Sennacherib’s Defeat”, p. 86.

¹⁹² Nielsen follows Wildberger in seeing Isa. 37:30-32 (2 Kgs 19:29-31) as a late addition. An Isaianic oracle was used by redactors, according to Nielsen (*There is Hope*, p. 174), to “provide the logical conclusion to the satirical song.” Nielsen comes to this conclusion because Isa. 37:30-32 do not appear to be appropriate here, being addressed to Hezekiah rather than to Sennacherib. The link between the images of v. 24 and v. 31 is not too successful, Nielsen argues, because the former involves cedars and cypresses,

“passionate commitment”¹⁹³ of the Lord of Hosts,¹⁹⁴ who will ensure the preservation of the remnant.

Verses 32-34 contain a specific oracle regarding the fate of Sennacherib and his army. The prayer of Hezekiah for the deliverance of Jerusalem is amply answered (19:19a), for now YHWH promises that Sennacherib will not enter the city or even get near enough to shoot an arrow into it or build a siege ramp against it. A series of four verbs, all in the negative, emphasizes YHWH’s determination to halt Sennacherib’s devouring of Judah (19:32). Not only will the Assyrian be halted, but also attack will be turned into retreat (19:33).

In v. 34 YHWH gives the reason for his promise: “For I will defend this city to save it, for my own sake and for the sake of my servant David.” Victory will enhance the reputation of YHWH. In a society where honour is important, it is not surprising to see YHWH depicted as saving Jerusalem for his own sake. Possibly this links with Hezekiah’s desire that all kingdoms might know that YHWH is God alone (19: 19b). The other reason given is for the sake of David, his servant. Since Hezekiah has been depicted as being compared favourably with his forebear (18:3),¹⁹⁵ it would seem worthwhile to look more closely at this designation.

My Servant David

The servant motif probably indicates that David is recognized by YHWH as his vassal and indicates his covenant status as the lesser of two unequal

and the latter vines. Isa. 37:30-32 may be an addition, yet there is no reason why in the middle of an oracle taunting and denouncing Sennacherib there cannot be a parenthesis with a message of encouragement for Hezekiah. Indeed, it is Hezekiah who receives the oracle, not the Assyrian. Furthermore, the vine seems more appropriate than a cedar, which is usually identified with Lebanon, if God is speaking about a Judahite remnant, since the vine is so often symbolic of Israel. Why Nielsen seems to think that the trees should match in these two sections is not clear. As suggested above, the sign may be a response to the Rabshakeh’s offer to provide fig trees and vines (Isa. 36:16/2 Kgs 18:31), in which case cedars and cypresses would be totally inappropriate.

¹⁹³ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 512.

¹⁹⁴ יהוה צבאות (Lord of Hosts) is the probable reading in 19:31; see BHS ad loc.

¹⁹⁵ See ch. 1.



parties.¹⁹⁶ As a servant, David would be expected to live in accordance with the stipulations of the covenant. Several Old Testament figures such as Abraham, and Caleb are designated as servants of YHWH, but it is Moses¹⁹⁷ and David who seem especially to attract this appellation. As McCarthy notes, David is seen to be very important, even meriting comparison with Moses.¹⁹⁸ Both men are depicted as ideal leaders who work for the good of their people by being in loyal relationship with God.

This verse and 20:6 are the last echoes in the Deuteronomistic History of the promise of YHWH to David as recorded in 2 Sam. 7. As Gerbrandt has observed, "Although these verses do not directly quote from the Davidic promise, they can only be explained within the History in light of the promise... The promise given to David in 2 Samuel 7 is effective for the Davidic dynasty, and for all of Judah despite the sins of individual kings."¹⁹⁹ The election of David and his descendants as rulers of God's people, alongside the election of Israel, holds a place of special distinction in the Old Testament. There are other individuals who are elected, only to be rejected at a later stage. However, as Rowley notes, the election of the house of David goes beyond the usual king making and king breaking performed by the prophets.²⁰⁰ Through Nathan YHWH promises David:

"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:12-16).

¹⁹⁶ See Kenik, *Design*, p. 87 and pp. 99-104.

¹⁹⁷ E.g. in Josh. 1:2, 7.

¹⁹⁸ Dennis J. McCarthy, "II Samuel 7 and the Structure of the Deuteronomic History", *JBL* 84 (1965), pp. 131-138 (132).

¹⁹⁹ Gerbrandt, *Kingship*, p. 166.

²⁰⁰ H.H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1950), p. 98.

The special significance of the election of David is highlighted by the assertion of YHWH which is found in 1 Sam. 15:29, where YHWH makes it clear that he does not repent of certain commitments which he has made: "... the Glory of Israel will not lie or repent ; for he is not a man, that he should repent."²⁰¹ The clue to the meaning of v. 29 is found in v. 28b, argues Moberly.²⁰² The kingdom has been torn from Saul and given to a neighbour, whom YHWH judges to be preferable. In the next chapter, we are introduced to David, and witness his secret anointing by the prophet Samuel. Thus, it is not divine "repentance" *per se* which is denied,²⁰³ "Rather the text specifies the positive commitment of God to make David king over Israel. It is this on which God will not go back, as though it were in any way an equivocal or deceptive undertaking such as humans commonly make."²⁰⁴ The primary place given to the election of David is evidenced by God's refusal to revoke it.

The motif of God acting for the sake of David, or, as the same thought is sometimes expressed, that David may always have a lamp before YHWH in Jerusalem, is found predominantly in 1 Kings 11 (vv. 12, 13, 32, 34, 36), where Solomon's reign is coming to its rather sad and ignominious end. Despite his turning away from YHWH, Solomon's descendants will still have one tribe to rule over because of David. Again, it is stated that despite the sins of Abijam (1 Kgs. 15:4-5) and Jehoram (2 Kgs. 8:19) the Davidic dynasty is allowed to remain "for the sake of David".

All the above passages that contain the phrase, "for the sake of David", refer to the failures of kings to do what is right. If it is the case that this statement "for the sake of David" occurs elsewhere in the context of kings who are judged to have failed to live up to the prescribed standard, this raises the question as to whether the use of the phrase in the present

²⁰¹ See R.W.L. Moberly, "'God Is Not a Human That He Should Repent' (Numbers 23:19 and 1 Samuel 15:29)", in Tod Linfelt and Timothy K. Beal (eds.), *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1998), pp. 112-123.

²⁰² Moberly, "Repent", p. 120.

²⁰³ Cf. the discussion above.

²⁰⁴ Moberly, "Repent", p.120.

context may imply that Hezekiah is considered by YHWH to be at fault. However, it seems clear that this is not so. First, there is no overt statement of judgement against Hezekiah; he is not said to have failed to keep God's laws or to have committed the sins of his fathers. Secondly, only here and in 2 Kgs. 20:6 do we find the phrase "for my own sake" (למעני) preceding the phrase, "for my servant David's sake". Provan, following Wildberger, notes that "for my own sake" is a phrase characteristic of Deutero-Isaiah.²⁰⁵ The implication would appear to be that YHWH is not acting against his better judgement because of his covenant with David, but that this is something that he really wants to do.

The question that is raised here is why YHWH should be shown to be emphasizing this point. Possibly, it is to make it clear that what God wants, including what is proper in view of YHWH's promises to David, and what Hezekiah desires, coincide.

19:35-37

The defeat of the army is mentioned in a brief "matter-of-fact" way, which denies us many of the details that a modern reporter would desperately demand. All we are told is that an angel or messenger (מלאך) of YHWH went out and killed 185,000 in the Assyrian camp. "There surely is irony in the work of a 'messenger' to counter the Assyrian 'messengers' who earlier were so arrogant but now are completely impotent and irrelevant."²⁰⁶ As Seitz notes, it is the death of Sennacherib that seems to captivate the attention of the author more than the killing of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers.²⁰⁷ In the context of this narrative, perhaps this is not surprising, since it is Sennacherib who is the chief antagonist against Hezekiah, and ultimately, YHWH himself. For it is the Assyrian king who has manifested such *hubris* against YHWH, threatening YHWH's king in Judah, and casting aspersions upon the power and reliability of

²⁰⁵ It is found only in Isa. 43:25 and 48:11 (twice). See Provan, *Hezekiah and the Book of Kings*, p. 119; Wildberger, *Jesaja* 28-39, p. 1436.

²⁰⁶ Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings*, p. 514.

²⁰⁷ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 252-253.

YHWH. It is then the supreme irony at the climax of the plot that Sennacherib should be murdered while at worship in the temple of Nisroch. His god is shown to be incapable of protecting him, just as Sennacherib had claimed that the gods of various nations were unable to protect their devotees. Sennacherib's god can only gaze in silence in contrast to YHWH, who answers the prayer of his subject.²⁰⁸ The great man of battle and conquest dies not by the sword of his enemy, but at the hands of his own sons. The enemy is defeated and killed, as most readers no doubt hoped, but the dramatic tension has lain in the way that this denouement has been wrought. Hezekiah seemed to be without hope, a powerless captive in a besieged city, shut up "like a caged bird", but Sennacherib reckoned without the faith and praying of Hezekiah, which this narrative depicts as the key to his deliverance.

Conclusions

The geographical settings of the narrative may be of literary and theological significance. The conduit is a reminder of the vital importance of a water supply for a city (18:17). It may symbolically indicate the life and death struggle that was about to be faced by Hezekiah. Another apparently important geographical setting is that of the temple. When Hezekiah asks Isaiah to pray, Hezekiah is in the house of the LORD (2 Kgs 19:1-2). Later, when Hezekiah prays during the siege, he goes into the temple (19:14). The temple seems to play a significant role in Hezekiah's life, which may hint at his devotion to YHWH.

In terms of plot, the initial conflict situation shows Sennacherib, who had taken all the other cities of Judah, now confronting Jerusalem. The plot gives rise to tension several times. Tribute fails to dissuade Hezekiah's enemy from surrounding the city. Later, when Hezekiah has heard from YHWH through his prophet, Isaiah, that Sennacherib will hear a rumour and return to his own land, Sennacherib sends a letter to Hezekiah that contains language even more threatening than that heard from the

²⁰⁸ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 339.

Rabshakeh. The return of the Assyrian to his country seems to be unduly delayed. It looks as though faith will be of no use in the face of the superpower. Yet the end, when it does come, is swift and devastating for the Assyrians.

The two main human characters, Hezekiah and Sennacherib, are introduced at the very beginning of the narrative (2 Kgs 18:13). There is a clear contrast between them, which helps to define the portrayal of both. In contrast to the arrogance and *hubris* of Sennacherib, Hezekiah exhibits humility and deference to YHWH. Because of the derision perpetrated by the Assyrian against Hezekiah's God, the Judahite demonstrates a filial concern for the honour of YHWH. YHWH is depicted as having the power to control situations. He can cause the king of Assyria to hear a rumour and cause him to return to his own land. YHWH is more than a match for Sennacherib; he is the creator God, who knows everything about the king, and will bring him into submission.

Some scholars have assessed Hezekiah negatively because of the payment of tribute to Sennacherib, yet this does not seem to produce any condemnation from the narrator. Others surmise that he may have made an alliance with Egypt. Yet, the text does not admit of such an alliance. Rather the text focuses on Hezekiah as a man of devotion to his God. The faith that is attributed to Hezekiah may be seen as a personal trust in YHWH as implied by the repeated and ironical use of אֱלֹהֵי by the Rabshakeh. For example, the Assyrian envoy failed to comprehend the destruction of the shrines (2 Kgs 18:22), and by revealing his ignorance of YHWH's requirements, highlighted just how valuable was Hezekiah's reliance on YHWH. The Rabshakeh casts doubt on the value of trusting in humans, such as the Egyptians and Hezekiah, or in God. The theme of trust reaches a climax when Sennacherib focuses upon Hezekiah's trust in YHWH (19:10).

The actions of Hezekiah, especially his praying to God in the temple

would seem to confirm his trust in YHWH. Prayer and faith are clearly connected. Hezekiah's faith is expressed by his prayer, and it is because Hezekiah has prayed (19:20) that a dramatic result is achieved. It is a faith born out of powerlessness, an illustration of the effectiveness of total dependency upon God. Hezekiah demonstrates his grief by the wearing of sackcloth and the tearing of his clothes. If Hezekiah were considered guilty of making an alliance with Egypt, or showing a lack of loyalty to YHWH in some other way, these actions might suggest penitence. However, the narrative offers no certain proof that this is the case. Within the narrative, it might also be asserted that Hezekiah appears to show signs of a growing confidence, evidenced by his direct prayer to God without any mention of seeking out the prophet. Again, the words of the prayer indicate a strong belief in and reliance upon YHWH. There are themes in the prayer that are similar to some found in Deutero-Isaiah and may suggest what some might term "monotheism". This "belief model" of faith emphasizes the epistemic aspect,²⁰⁹ so it is noteworthy that the prayer ends with the desire that all the kingdoms of the earth may *know* that Hezekiah's God alone is the Lord (v.20).

²⁰⁹ William L. Sessions, *The Concept of Faith: A Philosophical Investigation* (Ithaca: Cornell University 1996), p. 20.

Chapter Three - Exegesis of 2 Kings 20:1-11

Introduction

The stories of Hezekiah’s sickness, and subsequent recovery, and the visit of the envoys of Merodach-baladan are placed immediately after the description of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in 701 B.C.E. It is widely accepted that they do not follow the siege chronologically, but have been placed here for literary and theological reasons. As Ackroyd notes, the present arrangement may be due to a lack of chronological information, but “...it would appear more likely that the arrangement, whether or not chronological information was available, has some deliberate purpose.”¹ The two incidents recorded in 2 Kings 20 are linked together by the theme of Hezekiah’s illness; the ostensible reason given for the visit from Merodach-baladan is that he had heard about Hezekiah’s affliction.² The second major part of ch. 20 begins in v. 12 with a phrase (בָּעֵת הַהִיא) that temporarily connects the visit of the delegation from Merodach-baladan with the first part.³ Hobbs sees a structure in the second part that is parallel to the first. He considers that “An historical setting is established against which a prophetic word is given. The king then reacts to that word:

Setting:	The king is sick.	The visitors from Babylon.
Word:	You shall die/recover.	Exile will take place.
Reaction:	Prayer – delay	Shrugs it off - delay.” ⁴

Hezekiah’s personal character is a kind of parallel to that of the nation. The fulfilment of the word declaring that the king will die is delayed by fifteen years after Hezekiah has prayed; likewise, the prophecy regarding the exile is for a later time; it will be delayed until after the days of Hezekiah. Possibly, there is a link between verses 3 and 19. Three roots are found in both verses: אָמֵן and שָׁלוֹם, טוֹב. In v. 3, Hezekiah rehearses

¹ Peter R. Ackroyd, “An Interpretation of the Babylonian Exile: A Study of II Kings 20 and Isaiah 38-39”, in *Studies in the Religious Tradition of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1987), pp. 152-180 (155).
² Ackroyd, “Interpretation”, pp. 155-6.
³ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 288.
⁴ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 288.

his good character. He has done what is good (הַטוֹב) in God's sight. Now he considers the word of YHWH to be good (v. 19). He has walked in faithfulness or truth (אֱמֶת)⁵ and with a whole (שָׁלֵם) heart. These seem to find a kind of fulfilment, or, at least, correspondence in v. 19. His wholeness of heart is matched by peace, at least in his lifetime, and his faithfulness is rewarded with "security", which is the usual translation given here. The same roots are used, albeit with different nuances of meaning. It is almost as if the prospect of peace and security in his day is the answer to the prayer of v. 3. Whereas Hezekiah does not specifically ask for healing in his prayer (although it may well have been implied), his moral attributes seem to be matched by the peaceful conditions for the land in v. 19.

Not only are there links between the two incidents recounted in ch. 20, but also between the narrative relating to the king's illness and the Assyrian siege, as several scholars have noted.⁶ Both the king and the city face a crisis and both enjoy a reprieve, but that reprieve will be short-lived. This is particularly evident in 2 Kgs. 20:6, which forms an important link with the preceding chapter. The key word "deliver" (נָצַל) in 20:6 is found several times in chs. 18 and 19⁷ and the assertion by YHWH that he will defend the city for his own sake and that of his servant, David, is found in 19:34. To sum up in Clements' words: "... the three stories are concerned with the role of Jerusalem and the Davidic kingship in God's purpose for Israel, for which the report of what happened in 701 provides the point of primary interest."⁸

20:1-2

The narrative begins with a general reference to time: "In those days"

⁵ See discussion below on the meaning of אֱמֶת.

⁶ See, for example, Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), p. 155. The actual account of Hezekiah's illness (20:1-11) may well have been edited with the Assyrian invasion in mind. See Knoppers, "Incomparability", p. 418.

⁷ 18:29, 18:30, 18:32, 18:33, 18:34, 18:35, 19:11, 19:12

⁸ Clements, *Deliverance of Jerusalem*, p. 52.

(בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם). This may seem “quite vague”⁹ for the historian’s purposes and may well be meant to indicate a chronological link with the preceding two chapters, as asserted by Ackroyd,¹⁰ but it is interesting that Hezekiah refers to “my days” in 2 Kings 20:19 (Isaiah 39:8, the final verse of the section in Isa. 39). This contrasts with the future of Hezekiah’s dynasty; “the days are coming” is the phrase used by Isaiah to introduce an oracle warning of coming exile (2 Kgs. 20:17/ Isaiah 39:6). In the psalm of Hezekiah, found only in the Isaianic version, Hezekiah speaks of his stage in life as “the noontide of my days” (Isaiah 38:10). The lament turns to hope by the end of the psalm, where Hezekiah looks forward to singing with stringed instruments “all the days of our life” (38:20). There appears to be an emphasis on time, which is reflected by the sign that is given to Hezekiah of the reversing of the sun’s shadow. Signs may carry a parabolic significance. The sign granted in 20:9-11 not only works to confirm God’s promise to Hezekiah, (in which case any miracle might have sufficed) but seems to possess a metaphorical character that is symbolic of the nature of God. In this instance, the sign points to God’s power over time. He is the eternal God; Hezekiah is mortal and powerless in the face of disease and death. Only with God’s help can Hezekiah live for another fifteen years. As is so often the case in the Bible there is an improvement, an amelioration of the situation, but Hezekiah will still die eventually, just as the city of Jerusalem will have to yield to foreign invaders. The shadow may go back ten steps, but it will move forward again. Any delay is only for a time, the inevitable will still take place.

Another *leitwort* or key word in 2 Kgs. 20 is “house” (בַּיִת), which is used on several occasions, albeit with different nuances of meaning. In v.1, it suggests Hezekiah’s household or dynasty. It is used of the temple (House of the LORD) in 20:5 and 20:8. In 20:13, 15 and 17 it is used of his home. The connection between royal dynasty and God’s house is clearly portrayed; the two rise and fall together. Hezekiah is told to set his

⁹ John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 2nd edn, 1970), p. 697. Cf. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 289; Webb, *Message*, p. 154.

house in order, because he is about to die.¹¹ An analogy may be drawn with the situation described in 1 Kgs. 1, where the narrative indicates the impotence of David in view of his imminent death. David is unable to control his body, viz. his not knowing the beautiful Abishag (1 Kgs. 1:4), nor is he able to control his family, viz. the intention of Adonijah to be king. It is largely through the intervention of a prophet, in this case Nathan, that the old king is goaded into action and puts his house in order, that is, he swears that he will make Solomon king as previously promised to Bathsheba on some unspecified occasion.¹² Both Hezekiah and David are facing death, although the circumstances are somewhat different. They are both spoken to by a prophet. In both situations there is a political need to indicate clearly the next successor to avoid a political vacuum, but there is also a spiritual necessity, since the covenant promise made to David is that “your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever” (2 Sam. 7:16). The prophet, whether Nathan or Isaiah, has an important role in ensuring that the succession continues in fulfilment of YHWH’s promise. The successor may not live up to expectations, but even then the promise is kept (1 Kgs. 11:36, 15:4; 2 Kgs. 8:19) until the last of the Judean kings, Jehoiachin, who is given a seat above the seat of other kings in exile in Babylon in a kind of parody of the eternal throne.¹³

The character of Hezekiah, and indeed of his ancestor, David, is enhanced in the reader’s mind by the apparent closeness and friendliness of the relationship between king and prophet. Cohn contrasts Hezekiah’s expected demise with the death scenes of three Israelite kings: Jeroboam (1 Kgs. 14), Ahaziah (2 Kgs. 1) and Ben-hadad (2 Kgs. 8). All three

¹⁰ Ackroyd, “Interpretation”, p. 153.

¹¹ As Robert Cohn (“Convention and Creativity in the Book of Kings: The Case of the Dying Monarch”, *CBQ* 47 (1985), pp. 603-616 [613]) notes, this may well indicate grace on God’s part rather than judgement, in that Hezekiah is forewarned of his demise and given time to prepare for what seems inevitable.

¹² There is the possibility, as several scholars have noted, that Nathan and Bathsheba have conspired to have Solomon made king and are able to persuade David that this was his intention also, because of David’s age and possible failing memory. See, e.g., Alter, *Narrative*, pp. 98-100.

¹³ Nelson, *Kings*, p. 29.

enquire of a prophet, and that prophet may be far away at the time of enquiry. Isaiah, however, comes unbidden to Hezekiah. He is near at hand in Jerusalem, apparently fully recognized as the prophet of YHWH. The latter point may be emphasized by the addition of the epithet **הַנָּבִיא** (the prophet) to Isaiah's name. His role at this point is clearly enunciated. The relationship of Hezekiah with Isaiah is thus very different from the hostile one associated with the Israelite kings.¹⁴

There is no record in this report of how Isaiah came to know what YHWH foresaw regarding Hezekiah's demise; nor are we told of a command from YHWH to Isaiah to meet with Hezekiah. Only in v. 4 do we read of the Lord's word coming to Isaiah after he has pronounced Hezekiah's fate and Hezekiah has brought his petition for himself before God. It is not unusual in the Old Testament to find God consulting with one of his prophets in such a way that the intercession of the prophet is often seen to have some bearing on God's course of action.¹⁵ Yet, here there is no mention of Isaiah interceding for Hezekiah. Rather Hezekiah's own cry to YHWH is seen to be effective. That the narrative shows the king, rather than the prophet, making such an impact upon God heightens the status of Hezekiah and suggests he is man of faith and/or piety. There is another possibility, which has been proposed by Begg, who is looking for an explanation as to why Josephus completely omits the prophetic intervention. He suggests that Isaiah's "...earlier announcement might well appear to be an instance of false prophecy"¹⁶ and this would stain the reputation of a prophet, who in Josephus's eyes always brought accurate predictions. Whether or not Josephus was concerned that the first

¹⁴ See Cohn, "Convention", pp. 612-613 and his *2 Kings*, pp. 140-141. In his article, Cohn argues that the ends of the four kings follow a pattern significantly similar enough to speak of a type scene. One wonders, however, about the inclusion of Hezekiah, as the differences between him and the others are quite great. Hezekiah is Judean, not Israelite; he does not enquire of a prophet; he is the only one seen to be loyal to YHWH; he alone tries to avert the divine decree, and most importantly, Hezekiah does not die at this time.

¹⁵ For example, Gen. 18:17-3; Ex. 32:7-14; Amos 7:16. See Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (OBT, 14; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), pp.49-53.

¹⁶ C.T. Begg, "Hezekiah's Illness and Visit According to Josephus" in *Estudios Biblicos* 53 (1995), pp. 365-385 (368).

prophecy might be false, there seems to be no good reason for taking such a view today, as the way that the narrative is written is clearly meant to focus the reader's attention on Hezekiah and his prayer. Indeed, the fact that Hezekiah is the first named character in this section draws attention to him. The prophetic messages from Isaiah provide the setting in which Hezekiah can be portrayed as the man of faith. The first message initiates the crisis; the second amply demonstrates the effectiveness of Hezekiah's praying.

As noted above,¹⁷ the recording of royal prayers is rare in the Deuteronomistic History. Hezekiah is the only king whose prayers are recorded apart from those of David and Solomon at important theological junctures in the narrative. As with the previous prayer of Hezekiah, there seems to be a resonance with Solomon's dedicatory prayer in the temple found in 1 Kgs 8. Hezekiah's claim to have walked before God with a whole heart recalls Solomon's declaration that YHWH is a God who keeps covenant with and shows love to his "servants who walk before thee with all their heart" (1 Kgs. 8:23).

The inclusion of Hezekiah's prayer has the effect of emphasizing the importance of this passage. Such prayers may arrest the reader's attention and heighten interest, because of their association with solemn and/or critical situations.¹⁸ The sparing use made of prayer in the Deuteronomistic History may be seen as a further underlining of this point.

The act of turning to the wall has been interpreted in multifarious ways. It is unlikely to be sulking, as Hobbs has asserted.¹⁹ Gray thinks that it "was perhaps a symbolic act of renunciation of the world and turning to God alone."²⁰ Some commentators see it simply as taking the opportunity to

¹⁷ See p. 86.

¹⁸ J. Corvin, *A Stylistic and Functional Study* (unpublished PhD thesis; Emory University, 1972), p. 105.

¹⁹ Thus Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 290.

²⁰ Gray, *I and II Kings*, p. 697.

commune with God.²¹ Yet, it would not be necessary to turn to the wall to do this. Perhaps it symbolizes the despair of Hezekiah.²² He prays, yet rather than looking upwards, he turns to the blank wall.

20:3

In his prayer, Hezekiah asserts three qualities that he believes will be pleasing to his God. Direct speech, especially inward speech, is very important in narrative and often gives the key to the understanding of a passage and may give strong evidence regarding the attitude and temperament of a character. Alter asserts that "With the report of inward speech, we enter the realm of relative certainty about character: there is certainty, in any case, about the character's conscious intentions, though we may still feel free to question the motive behind the intention."²³ It is true that there may be some debate about Hezekiah's motivation and, in particular, his words might be taken to reflect a boastful motivation.²⁴ Hobbs, for example, states, "The prayer of Hezekiah in the second circumstance is characterized by its self-centredness, not its faith."²⁵ Certainly, we might find such assertions of righteousness, as those made by Hezekiah, to be lacking in modesty today, to say the least. Yet, it must be remembered that Hezekiah is portrayed as praying to God in what might be considered a private audience with YHWH, depending on what "turned his face to the wall" means. It seems unlikely that the author's intention here is to portray Hezekiah as a boastful or self-centred individual. However, in any case, whatever his motivation, the prayer is recorded to convey to the reader what type of man Hezekiah is in the eyes of the author. It is interesting to contrast Balentine's assessment of the narrative with that of Hobbs. The former author's comments are the complete opposite of Hobbs's observations. Balentine considers that the prayers of Hezekiah (here and in 19:15-19) are "...designed by their careful rhetoric to illustrate the *selflessness* of one who places himself

²¹ For example, Gwilym H. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings* (2 vols., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Basingstoke: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1984), *1 and 2 Kings*, II, p. 586.

²² Cf. 1 Kgs 21:4, although the circumstances are somewhat different.

²³ See Alter, *Narrative*, p.117.

²⁴ This interpretation is found in the Babylonian Talmud (b. Sanh. 104a).

completely and securely at God's disposal. His is the ideal posture before God, the paradigm of the effective pray-er."²⁶ The fact that the king's prayer is answered is confirmation of his exemplary character and that God accepts Hezekiah's own assessment of himself.

The first word of the prayer, **הִנֵּנִי**, is a rare word in the Hebrew Bible and may indicate an excited mood. It is found twice within the context of prayers in the book of Jonah, first upon the lips of the Gentile sailors (1:14) and later in Jonah's prayer when he is angry with God for withholding the judgment which was threatened upon the Ninevites (4:2). It may be used to emphasize the urgency of the situation.

The Hebrew word, which is usually translated as "remember" (**זָכַר**),²⁷ often means far more than mental recollection. For example, it may have the sense of "consideration, mindfulness" as in Ps. 8:5: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" God's remembering often implies direct action, which may be as a result of an individual's prayer. The prayer of Hannah is a notable example of this. She specifically asks that God will remember her (1 Sam.1:11) and the narrator states that that is exactly what YHWH did (v. 19). Hannah conceives and bears the son she has desperately wanted. Samson is another example of a plaintiff asking God to remember him. He wants God to remember him and strengthen him (Judg. 16:28). The immediate purpose is to destroy the Philistines by bringing down the roof of their temple upon their heads, but the specific content of the remembering is not specified. As Miller suggests, it may be Samson's past faithfulness, his present predicament, or the oppression perpetrated by the Philistines.²⁸

²⁵ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 296.

²⁶ Balentine, *Prayer*, p. 64 (my italics).

²⁷ On the meaning of the root **זָכַר** see Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (SBT, 37; London: SCM, 1962); Willy Schottroff, 'Gedenken' im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament: Die Wurzel Zakar im Semitischen Sprachkreis (WMANT, 15; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2nd edn, 1967).

²⁸ Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), p. 93.

The apparent effect of God remembering is dramatically illustrated in the flood story. Gen. 8:1 stands at the midpoint of the narrative. As Brueggemann has commented, there was death and destruction up to this point and ch.7 closes with the sad note that only Noah and the inhabitants of the ark were left. When God remembers Noah, the waters begin to subside and the possibility of a new start upon the cleansed earth becomes real. Brueggemann asserts, "It is *remembering* which changes the situation of the world from *hostility* to *commitment*."²⁹ Later in this narrative, we are told that the bow will be a reminder to God of his covenant with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature (Gen. 9:14-15).

The word זָכַר is found elsewhere in connection with God's covenant.³⁰ For example, in Ps. 106:45 his remembrance of his covenant meant that God relented (נָחַם) of his judgement upon Israel, because of his love (חַסֵּד). See also Ps. 105:8 and Ps. 111:5. In Ex. 32:13-14 Moses begs YHWH to remember the patriarchs and his promises of progeny and land to them. "The appeal to the divine memory is an appeal to the faithfulness of the God who keeps promises", asserts Miller.³¹ The result is repentance on God's part.³² In the book of Nehemiah the imperative of the verb זָכַר is used several times, sometimes for God to remember him or his good deeds, and at other times for God to remember his enemies because of their evil deeds. In particular, Nehemiah prays: "Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people" (Neh. 5:19). These brief prayers give the impression of extempore cries, invoking God to act for good or bad according to the object in question. "The appeal to divine memory carries with it, therefore, an assumption that God's remembering is not simply a favourable attitude but involves activity for

²⁹ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 86 (author's italics).

³⁰ See Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 76-77 regarding parallels to זָכַר found in Assyrian grants.

³¹ Miller, *They Cried*, p. 93.

³² See pp. 131-134 below.

or against the objects of memory..."³³ Hezekiah's opening plea may be seen as a means of seeking divine intervention from a God who is known for his love for his servants and a faithfulness in keeping his covenant. It echoes the acts of God in response to the cries of his people such as Abraham, Moses and Hannah.

Many prayers in the Old Testament include a motive clause, a setting out of reasons why God should answer that particular prayer. Often the motivation is a reference to the character and attributes of God, but in some cases, as here, it is primarily formulated with reference to the person who prays.³⁴ This is true of Jeremiah who maintains that he has committed his cause to YHWH (Jer. 11:20b and 20:12b). Asa and Jehoshaphat are two kings who claim in their prayers to rely on YHWH. These are recorded in Chronicles, which contains a number of royal prayers not paralleled in Kings (2 Chron. 14:11 and 20:12).

Hezekiah prays: "Remember now, O LORD, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee (הִתְהַלַּכְתִּי לְפָנֶיךָ) in faithfulness..." The way in which Hezekiah prays suggests that he expects YHWH to act in a beneficent way towards him because of his loyalty to YHWH. It implies a covenant relationship between the two, where mutual fidelity will be respected. In Gen. 17:1, Abram is commanded to walk before God and to be blameless. In return Abram is promised that God will make his covenant with him: "And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly (Gen. 17:2)." To walk before someone suggests loyal service and obedience to a suzerain.³⁵ The same kind of expectation of blessing in reciprocation for walking before YHWH is expressed in Gen. 24:40 as Abraham's servant reports the words of his master to Laban: "The LORD, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and prosper your way; and you shall take a wife for my son from my kindred and from my father's house." As Kenik states: "Abraham is

³³ Miller, *They Cried*, p. 94.

³⁴ Miller, *They Cried*, pp. 122-124.

³⁵ See Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 76 and Kenik, *Design*, p. 72.

confessing that he had been a loyal servant of Yahweh, that the relationship with Yahweh on his part was in order and therefore, he could rely upon Yahweh's fidelity to him in sending a wife for his son to insure the perpetuation of his family."³⁶ Jacob refers to both Abraham and Isaac walking before God when he blesses Joseph and calls upon God to bless Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:15). Again, the grounds of expectation of blessing rest on the basis of the loyalty of the patriarchs to God.

Within the Deuteronomistic History, the phrase is found several times in the narratives regarding Solomon. When Solomon prays³⁷ in 1 Kgs. 3:6 he refers to his father, David thus: "Thou hast shown great and steadfast love to thy servant David my father, because he walked before thee in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards thee..." David is described as having very similar qualities to those of Hezekiah, the first one (אֱמֶת) being identical. Clearly, YHWH's bestowal of steadfast love (חֶסֶד) is stated to be in direct relationship to David's fidelity to him. The phrase is used in several other places in the narratives about Solomon. It occurs at the beginning of the dedication prayer of the temple, where Solomon addresses God thus: "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to thy servants who walk before thee with all their heart..." (1 Kgs. 8:23). The next two verses indicate that David and Solomon are the servants to which reference is made.³⁸ Solomon is apparently deliberately connecting himself with his father. The promise has not failed for David, as Solomon has been established upon the throne. In v. 25, Solomon seeks that same fulfilment for his descendants by seeking to present himself before God as one who is obedient to the law.³⁹ The use of the phrase in v. 25, however, is conditional, as it is in the remaining texts of the Solomonic narratives. In 1 Kings 2:2-9 David issues his dying charge to Solomon. He refers to the

³⁶ Kenik, *Design*, pp.72-73.

³⁷ It is debatable whether this section should be called a prayer since YHWH initiates the conversation. See Balentine, *Prayer*, pp. 56-57.

³⁸ Kenik, *Design*, p. 77.

³⁹ Kenik, *Design*, p. 77.

covenant YHWH made to him in 2 Sam. 7:11-16, but “The unconditional validity of the oracle is here made conditional, primarily through the use of *hālakh liphnê*.”⁴⁰ YHWH’s words to Solomon in 1 Kings 9:4 are again conditional. These “conditional” texts, which are found at the beginning of Solomon’s reign, at the dedication of the temple and in YHWH’s speech to him after his building programme is complete, apply to Solomon, but are not used in connection with David. When Hezekiah prays in 2 Kgs 20:3 no conditional particle is found. It would seem that Hezekiah is placed in the same favourable light as his ancestor, David.⁴¹ According to Kenik, the formula *הָלַךְ לִפְנֵי* in its equivalent form in Hittite court documents indicates “...the obedience of the reigning king to his patronal deity. In the biblical tradition, *הָלַךְ לִפְנֵי* clearly implies the loyal service on the part of the patriarch or king toward Yahweh with whom he is related in covenant.”⁴² Hezekiah’s relationship with YHWH is portrayed as similar to that of the patriarchs and David. Hezekiah, in claiming to have walked before YHWH is not necessarily being depicted as boasting, but is seen to be using his obedient service to YHWH as grounds on which to expect a favourable answer from God as did his forebears. The positive answer to Hezekiah’s prayer indicates that YHWH accepts that a covenant relationship exists between him and Hezekiah; there is mutual fidelity on the part of YHWH and Hezekiah.

The three virtues, which Hezekiah claims to possess, call for detailed discussion. This is especially true in the case of the first, *אֱמֶת*, as this is

⁴⁰ F. J. Helfmeyer, “*הָלַךְ*”, *TDOT*, III, pp. 388-403 (393). Kenik (*Design*, pp. 80-81) asserts that the use of the conditional clause “is a literary device used by the Dtr to foreshadow the deterioration of Solomon’s relationship with Yahweh.” Nelson (*Kings*, p. 29) maintains that the “throne of Israel” refers to the northern Kingdom, Israel. Lyle Eslinger (*Into the Hands of the Living God* [JSOTSup, 84; BLS, 24; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989], p. 126 n. 6.) notes that the usual explanation of the addition of the condition to the unconditional promise of dynasty to David is the work of a Deuteronomistic redactor (See, for example, Gray, *I & II Kings*, p. 100). Eslinger’s view, in the literary context of the passage, is that David is deliberately playing on Solomon’s insecurities in order to secure the executions of his enemies even after his death. “The conditionalized dynastic promise is designed coercion or allurement: either it forces an insecure successor to do what is bidden with a view to gaining God’s blessing or it reveals a sinister rationalization to the man who would be king” (p. 127).

⁴¹ Kenik, *Design*, p. 80.

⁴² Kenik, *Design*, p. 80. See also Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 76.

generally agreed to come from the root אָמַן. The meaning of אֱמֶת is, however, debated. The main meanings attributed to the word are “truth”⁴³ and “faithfulness”.⁴⁴

The term, however, may be polysemous; different meanings may depend upon the different contexts in which it is found. Thus, Thiselton ties the sense of אֱמֶת as “truth” to speaking and the sense of “faithfulness” to deeds.⁴⁵ This generally seems to work, although there may be examples where there is an overlap of meaning.⁴⁶

As Moberly notes, “It is often used of speaking the truth, as when the Queen of Sheba acknowledges that the report she had heard of Solomon's wisdom was indeed true, (אֱמֶת הָיָה הַדְּבָר 1 Kgs 10:6 || 2 Chron 9:5; cf. 1 Kgs 17:24; 22:16; Prov 14:25; Dan 8:26; 10:1; 11:2).”⁴⁷

אֱמֶת is often used in reference to God's acts, especially in his dealings with his people. One example is Ex. 34:6, which is the *locus classicus*

⁴³ G. Quell (“ἀληθεια: A. The Old Testament term אֱמֶת”, *TDNT*, pp. 232-237 [233 n. 2]) for example, favours this translation. He asserts that “The translation ‘faithfulness’ nowhere commends itself...” However, he qualifies his opinion to some extent at a later point in the article. He states, “The much favoured translation ‘faithfulness’ is materially justifiable, since it is in fact a matter of proving the covenant faithfulness of God ... Yet in order that there should be differentiation from אֱמֶת which is the proper legal term for faithfulness to a compact, I do not think it really suitable. This view is further supported by the frequent use of the expression אֱמֶת וְאֱמֶת. For although this seems to make the terms almost synonymous, they are not synonymous. God confirms אֱמֶת by acting according to the norm of אֱמֶת. Truthfulness is thus the presupposition of faithfulness. Hence to use the latter term for אֱמֶת always implies a measure of refining and retouching, and ought to be avoided” (p. 236 n.12).

⁴⁴ Thomas F. Torrance (“One Aspect of the Biblical Conception of Faith”, *ExpTim* 68 [1956/7], pp. 111-114) and Gabriel Hebert (“‘Faithfulness’ and ‘Faith’”, *Theology* 58 [1955], pp. 373-379) tend to favour the translation “faithfulness”, but both have been strongly criticized by James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: OUP, 1961), p. 161 ff.

⁴⁵ A.C. Thiselton, “Truth”, *NIDNTT*, III, p. 874-902 (878).

⁴⁶ Moberly, (“אֱמֶת”, p. 428) for example, argues, “When ... the psalmist celebrates Yahweh's torah and commandments as אֱמֶת (Ps. 119:43, 142, 151, 160), he does not just mean that they are true as opposed to false, but that they also have the character of being trustworthy and reliable for people to base their lives on. OT usage of אֱמֶת characteristically takes on such wider moral implications.”

⁴⁷ Moberly, “אֱמֶת”, p. 428.

evidencing God's אֱמֶת for his covenant people at Sinai. The context suggests that the term signifies Yahweh's willingness to remain faithful to his people despite their sin in the incident of the Golden Calf. Israel was faithless, but YHWH remained faithful.⁴⁸

God in turn looks for people who will respond to him in אֱמֶת. For a person to seek to reflect the moral attributes of God is fundamental to biblical ethics.⁴⁹ Thus, in his discussion of the term אֱמֶת, von Balthasar comments that "God's reliability requires a corresponding reliability in the man who has entered his covenant, both in his conduct vis-à-vis his fellows and in his conduct vis-à-vis God himself; the one conditions the other."⁵⁰ It seems clear that Hezekiah is claiming an attribute that he expects to be pleasing to God and one which signifies his relationship with him.

This brings us to consideration of the phrase בְּאֱמֶת. Kenik has exegeted in detail 1 Kings 3:6, where a similar phrase (הֲלֵךְ לְפָנַי בְּאֱמֶת) is found.⁵¹ She discusses the term אֱמֶת by looking at its frequent combination with the word חֶסֶד. However, she pays little attention to the use of אֱמֶת on its own. Kenik seems to assume that the term means "faithfulness" or "equity" without any reference to the debate on its meaning. She also seems to assume that its use with חֶסֶד as a hendiadys will indicate its meaning. While this may be true in the case of many words, such study may not be so helpful in this instance. Research undertaken on these two terms and their relationship has revealed that חֶסֶד always appears before אֱמֶת except in Hos. 4:1.⁵² This would suggest

⁴⁸ Moberly, "אֱמֶת", p. 429.

⁴⁹ Moberly, "אֱמֶת", p. 429.

⁵⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: a Theological Aesthetics, VI* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991) p. 172.

⁵¹ Kenik, *Design*, pp. 83-84.

⁵² Gordon R. Clark, *The Word Heseḏ in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup, 157; Sheffield: SAP, 1993), p.235. This might be termed a collocation rather than a hendiadys as both words are prefixed with אֵין, "there is no..."

that **חֶסֶד** is the more dominant of the two terms and this is the essence of the conclusions reached by Clark in his study on the word **חֶסֶד**. Clark's first two conclusions about the expression **חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת** are as follows:

"1. The frequency of occurrence indicates that the distribution of **חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת** and **חֶסֶד** have a greater resemblance than the distribution of **אֱמֶת** and **חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת**. 2. Examination of passages in which **חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת** occurs in parallel with other items indicates that this compound expression may be regarded as a simple semantic item, and suggests that the semantic area of **חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת** is closer to that of **חֶסֶד** than to that of **אֱמֶת**."⁵³ If Clark is correct, examination of the phrase **חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת** is of limited help in determining the meaning of **אֱמֶת** when it occurs without **חֶסֶד**.

The LXX of 2 Kings 20:3 has *ἐν ἀληθείᾳ*; the Aramaic targum has **בְּקִשׁוּט** and is translated as "in truth" by Harrington and Saldarini.⁵⁴ This would seem to make "in truth", "with integrity", "sincerely"⁵⁵ or some similar word or phrase the best translation, but the difficulties of rendering any term into another language need to be remembered. It is very possible that the Hebrew term **אֱמֶת** has a wide range of meaning, which is no doubt illustrated by the fact that Greek words other than *ἀλήθεια* are occasionally found as its translation in the LXX. Another factor, which needs to be borne in mind, is that the LXX is a translation that was made several hundred years after some of the original writings were produced, and, therefore, some change of nuance in meaning is possible.

A further possibility is to consider **אֱמֶת** in its syntagmatic context in 2 Kgs 20:3. The sense of **אֱמֶת** in the sentence might be suggested by its collocation with **לִכְבֹּשׁ שָׁלֵם**. Whatever the precise meaning of **אֱמֶת**, the following phrase suggests that the inner disposition of Hezekiah is being described. This contrasts with the outward actions which he undertook

⁵³ Clark, *Hesed*, p. 255.

⁵⁴ Daniel J. Harrington and Anthony J. Saldarini, *The Aramaic Bible, X: Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987) p.305.

(וְהַטּוֹב בְּעֵינֶיךָ עֲשִׂיתִי).

The second attribute that Hezekiah claims to possess is a **לֵב שָׁלֵם**. The adjective **שָׁלֵם** is usually considered to have the sense “whole” or “complete”, but the phrase **לֵב שָׁלֵם** is understood by Gerleman not to mean an “undivided” but a ‘paying,’ i.e., submissive, willing heart.”⁵⁶ His reason for rejection of the former interpretation is that it cannot be supported by reference to the parallel Akkadian expression. This may be seen as overly relying on comparative linguistics. The phrase appears to be virtually synonymous with the Deuteronomic expression found in the Shema (Deut 6:5) and elsewhere, **בְּכָל לֵב/לֵב לֵב**⁵⁷ and also with the phrases **לֵב תָּמִים**⁵⁸ and **תָּם לֵב**;⁵⁹ the latter is found on YHWH’s lips with reference to David, when he speaks to Solomon after the dedication of the temple.⁶⁰ Again, David is held up as an example of integrity. The use of **שָׁלֵם** with **לֵב/לֵב** occurs only in the books of Kings and Chronicles apart from the parallel reference to 2 Kgs 20:3 found in Isa. 38:3.

Eisenbeis has noted the contrasting use of **שָׁלֵם** in the other references in the books of Kings. Whereas **שָׁלֵם** is used attributively in 2 Kgs. 20:3, it is used in 1 Kgs. 8:61, 11:4, 15:3 and 15:14 predicatively in the phrase **הָיָה לָכֶם שָׁלֵם עִם־יְהוָה**, which he terms a “Formelhafte Ausdruck”.⁶¹ He draws attention to the use of **שָׁלֵם** with **עִם־יְהוָה** as a statement about the partnership between God and humankind.⁶² He asserts that in the context of the historical understanding of the Deuteronomistic work the

⁵⁵ This is found in the NJPSV.

⁵⁶ G. Gerleman, “שָׁלֵם”, *TLOT*, III, pp. 1337-1348 (1343).

⁵⁷ Deut. 4:29; 10:12; 11:13; 13:4; 26:16; 30:2, 6, 10; Jos. 22:5; 23:14; 1 Sam. 7:3; 12:24; 1 Kgs. 2:4; 8:23, 48; 14:8; 2 Kgs 10:31; 23:3, 25; 2 Chr. 6:14, 38; 15:12, 15; 22:9; 31:21; 34:31; Ps. 9:2; 86:12; 111:1; 119:2, 10, 34, 58, 69, 145; 138:1; Prov. 3:5; Jer. 3:10; 24:7; 29:13; 32:41; Joel 2:12; Zeph. 3:14

⁵⁸ Ps. 119:80

⁵⁹ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 335.

⁶⁰ 1 Kgs 9:4.

⁶¹ Walter Eisenbeis, *Die Wurzel שָׁלֵם im Alten Testament* (BZAW, 113; Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1969), pp. 339-41.

phrase gains a theological meaning, that God made particular promises to Israel and that Israel was, therefore, subject to specific obligations. This Eisenbeis exemplifies by looking at the other references in the book of Kings. 1 Kgs. 8:61 is recognized as a place of theological importance as there the necessary basis for relationship with God is conveyed in Solomon's exhortation to the people: "Let your heart therefore be wholly true to the LORD our God, walking in his statutes and keeping his commandments, as at this day (1 Kgs. 8:61)." The other references involve judgments on the behaviour of several kings including Solomon himself. Thus in 11:4 Solomon's heart is said to be not wholly true to YHWH. Abijam receives the same verdict in 15:3 where his heart is contrasted with that of his forebear, David. On the other hand Asa receives a positive commendation in 15:14, "... a degree of devotedness to God which reaches completeness."⁶³ Eisenbeis sees this use of שָׁלֵם as very different from its use in 2 Kgs. 20:3 where he considers that the focus of the expression is that Hezekiah has followed a way of life that is right in God's sight and that he, Hezekiah, should be rewarded for his right attitude and behaviour.⁶⁴ Whilst the context clearly carries the sense of expectation of reward for a devotedness signified by a לֵב שָׁלֵם, this attributive use of שָׁלֵם does not necessarily preclude a covenantal understanding of the phrase. In its use predicatively in the other references in the book of Kings, Eisenbeis draws attention to the phrase עָם־יְהוָה. Yet he seems to overlook the fact that in 2 Kgs. 20:3 Hezekiah is claiming to have walked *before* YHWH with a whole heart. As noted above, the phrase לִפְנֵי־יְהוָה probably echoes a covenantal understanding whereby the king as vassal is seen to show loyal obedience and submission to his suzerain, YHWH. In any case, the idea of reward may also be seen to be founded upon a covenantal basis. Hezekiah appeals to his whole-heartedness in his prayer because he is in covenantal

⁶² Eisenbeis, "שָׁלֵם", p. 340.

⁶³ Buber, *Faith*, p. 61.

⁶⁴ Eisenbeis, "שָׁלֵם", p. 339.

relationship with YHWH. If he were not, there would be little point in seeking God's intervention by claiming such devotedness to his God.

The third virtue, which is claimed by Hezekiah, is that he has done what is good in God's sight. The term טוֹב might at first sight be considered to refer to goodness in a moral sense. However, when it occurs in the phrase בְּעֵינֵי טוֹב with the name of a person in authority, it "can indicate conscious submission to someone else's authority on the basis of formal status."⁶⁵ For example, Abram tells Sarai that Hagar, her maid, is in her power (Gen. 16:6), and the Gibeonites are willing to give themselves into the hands of Joshua for him to do with them as he sees fit (Josh. 9:25). That what Hezekiah has done is good *in God's eyes* suggests a theological meaning. As a worshipper, he is willing to submit himself to God's will in prayer.

Brueggemann has drawn attention to the use of טוֹב as a catchword in the Deuteronomistic History,⁶⁶ partly in response to Wolff's work whose emphasis was on the need to repent (שׁוּב).⁶⁷ "Doing good" is seen as legal terminology emphasizing Israel's need to honour her covenant obligations to YHWH. The word is used several times in Deuteronomy to refer to Israel's responsibilities before YHWH, but appears only rarely in the Deuteronomistic History in connection with Israel's obligations, namely in 1 Sam. 12:23, 1 Kgs. 8:36 and 2 Kgs. 20:3. Again, a connection with Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple is evident. Brueggemann also investigates the connection of the Davidic traditions with the motif "good". He considers it very significant that there is a "clustering" of the term in the narratives concerning the Davidic house.⁶⁸ Brueggemann contrasts the character of Saul, who is portrayed as the one

⁶⁵ I. Höver-Johag, "טוֹב", *TDOT*, X, pp. 296-317 (308).

⁶⁶ Walter Brueggemann, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomistic Historian: Gospel for Exiles", *Int* 22 (1968), pp. 387-402. See also A.R. Millard, "For He is Good", *TynBul* 17 (1966), pp. 115-117.

⁶⁷ Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomic Historical Work", in W. Brueggemann (ed.), *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1975), pp. 83-100.

who refuses to do good when given the opportunity, with David, who refuses to harm Saul, but rather responds with good. "David is appreciated not simply as a great historical figure but as a means of faith and hope. Thus the 'good' of David is a theological datum in the narrative."⁶⁹ After David, Solomon is seen "as the vehicle for Yahweh's good toward Israel"⁷⁰ and even the word of Evil-merodach to Jehoiachin in exile (2 Kgs. 25:28) is seen by Brueggemann not just as an historical note, but also as a theological affirmation that the promise to David and his house still operates. Brueggemann might well have mentioned Hezekiah again in this section of his article, for, in claiming to have done what is good, Hezekiah is identified with the Davidic house and is one of the few kings who can be seen as faithful to YHWH. Hezekiah's doing good indicates his covenant relationship to YHWH, whereby he may expect his goodness to be reciprocated by YHWH. This is in line with Deut. 6:18: "And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the LORD, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land which the LORD swore to give to your fathers." To do good in the sight of YHWH signifies Hezekiah's submission to God.⁷¹

The phrases used by Hezekiah in his prayer clearly suggest a covenant relationship between the king and his God. Two main types of covenant were evident in the ancient Near East. Weinfeld differentiates between the two thus: "While the 'grant' constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant, the 'treaty' constitutes an obligation of the servant, the vassal, to his master the suzerain."⁷² It is the former type of covenant that Hezekiah seems to be invoking. The similarity between the terminology used in Hezekiah's prayer and an Assyrian grant is striking. Weinfeld quotes from the grant of Assurbanipal to his servant, Baltaya: "Baltaya...

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, "Kerygma", p. 397.

⁶⁹ Brueggemann, "Kerygma", pp. 397-398.

⁷⁰ Brueggemann, "Kerygma", p. 400.

⁷¹ Cf. 2 Kgs 18:3 where Hezekiah is said to have done what is right in YHWH's eyes

(וַיַּעַשׂ הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה). Also contrast the situations in Deut. 12:8 and Judg. 21:25.

⁷² Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p.74.

whose heart is devoted (lit. is whole) to his master, served me (lit. stood before me) with truthfulness and acted perfectly (lit. walked in perfection) in my palace, grew up with a good name kept the charge of my kingship.”⁷³ Hezekiah appears to be using terminology from the “grant” type of covenant in the hope of persuading his suzerain, YHWH, to reward him. To quote Weinfeld again, “...the grant is a reward for loyalty and good deeds *already performed*...”⁷⁴

The act of weeping bitterly is also worthy of comment. While it may be true that actions are the least reliable guide to understanding a particular character,⁷⁵ they nevertheless often accentuate what is already evident in a characterization. Hobbs refers to the weeping of Hezekiah as being “presumably for himself!”⁷⁶ The implication seems to be that this again emphasizes Hezekiah’s self-centredness. However, in times of deep distress, when faced with possible death, or mourning the death of a loved one, it is human nature to weep. His weeping is probably intended to indicate the depth of his grief. Botha argues, “Weeping seems to have signified a lack of arrogance and the presence of self-humiliation and reliance on YHWH.”⁷⁷ Comparison might be made with another biblical character such as Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:1-20. Her barrenness causes her such grief that she weeps in such a manner as to be considered drunk by old Eli. Her weeping is for herself and her impoverished situation as a childless woman, but it would seem rather callous to suggest that she is therefore, self-centred.

Yet there is another way of looking at Hezekiah’s action: the fact that he weeps may indicate his hope that God will hear his prayer and somehow reverse the situation.⁷⁸ Such a hope is evident in the story of David, who

⁷³ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 75; see also p. 77.

⁷⁴ Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy*, p. 75 (author’s italics).

⁷⁵ See Alter, *Narrative*, pp. 116-117.

⁷⁶ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 290.

⁷⁷ Botha, “Etiquette”, p. 44.

⁷⁸ Cohn, “Convention”, p. 613. Cohn sees a contrast between Hezekiah’s crying and that of Elisha (2 Kgs 8:11) who is “...grief-stricken because he saw the unalterability of Israel’s fate...The deuteronomistic author thus contrasts the dooming of Israel with the sparing of Judah.”

fasts and weeps so that he may receive a favourable answer regarding his son who is ill. While David's child still lived David wept, but upon receiving news of the child's death he got up from the ground, washed, changed, and went to the house of the LORD, and worshipped. The explanation that he proffers to his servants, is instructive: "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me (2 Sam. 12:22-23).'" In the narrative about King Josiah, weeping is again seen as one of the means of intensifying prayer, and thus gaining a favourable answer from God. Through Huldah the prophetess YHWH declares: "because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place, and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have rent your clothes and *wept* before me, I also have heard you says the LORD (2 Kgs. 22:19/2 Chron. 34:27)." Thus Hezekiah's weeping may be seen as an intensification of his praying, a reflection on the one hand of the desperation he feels, yet also a recognition that while he still lives there is the hope that YHWH may reverse the situation.

The physical setting of the act of praying is significant here. When Hezekiah prays during the siege, he goes into the temple (2 Kgs. 19:14 /Isa. 37:14). Previous to this, when Hezekiah asks Isaiah to pray, Hezekiah is in the house of the LORD (2 Kgs. 19:1-2/Isa. 37:1-2). On this occasion, however, he remains in his palace, although he is told through Isaiah that he will be able to go to the house of the LORD on the third day. The implication is that the temple is the place where prayer should properly be made, or at least that Hezekiah would prefer to petition God in the sanctuary. Werline contends that the function of the temple in Jerusalem has been redefined by the author of 1 Kings 8. In ancient Israel, it was seen as a place to sacrifice, whereas in 1 Kings 8 it has been

given the role of a place of prayer.⁷⁹ As well as the connection made between prayer and the temple in the dedicatory speech of Solomon (1 Kgs. 8:27-30), note may be taken of Hannah's prayer at the sanctuary at Shiloh (1 Sam. 1:3ff.) and the prayer of Jonah from the belly of the fish, where Jonah declares: "my prayer came to thee, into thy holy temple" (Jon. 2:8). Several of the Psalms also indicate that the sanctuary is the place of prayer.⁸⁰ In view of this strong connection between prayer and the temple and the way in which Hezekiah is portrayed previously as praying in the temple, it is surprising not to find him praying there. The narrative is emphasizing the seriousness of his illness by depicting Hezekiah as physically incapable of going to the temple on this occasion.

20:4-5

The narrator states, "And before Isaiah had gone out of the middle court,⁸¹ the word of the LORD came to him." The important point that the narrator is making is that Isaiah is spoken to by YHWH so quickly after Hezekiah has petitioned YHWH.⁸² The prayer is shown to be not only effective, but to be effective almost immediately.

It should be noted that there are several differences between the Kings and the Isaiah texts of these verses. The clause **וְיִשְׁעִיהוּ לֹא יָצָא הָעִיר הַחִכְנָה** is not found in Isa. 38:4. And whereas

⁷⁹ Rodney Alan Werline, *Penitential Prayer in Second Temple Judaism: The Development of a Religious Institution* (Early Judaism and its Literature, 13; Atlanta: Scholars Press 1998), pp. 25-26. On the relationship of prayer and the temple, see also Sharyn Echols Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:22-25 in the Context of Markan Theology* (SBLDS, 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press 1988), pp. 45-47.

⁸⁰ See Theodorus C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edn, 1970), pp. 280-281.

⁸¹ The translation of v. 4 is dependent on whether the kethib (הָעִיר, "city") or qere (הַחִכְנָה, "court") is read. Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 254) consider the MT to be a post-LXX corruption. It is probably true that the qere is most commonly accepted, but the kethib may be correct if the meaning is taken to be "citadel". Frank S. Frick, *The City in Ancient Israel* (SBLDS, 36; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1977), pp. 32-33 discusses two other passages in Kings which have caused difficulties for the translator (1 Kgs. 20:30 and 2 Kgs. 10:25), where various meanings have been suggested including "temple", "temple quarter" or "citadel". Frick prefers "citadel", by which he understands the inner quarter of the city containing the palace, the temple and administrative headquarters. Such an interpretation seems to suit the context of 20:4.

⁸² Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 141.

Kings has שׁוּב at the beginning of the v. 5, Isa. 38:5 has הֵלֹךְ. שׁוּב is more appropriate in the Kings context where it is implied that Isaiah has just left the king's presence. Two phrases in 20:5 are also lacking in the Isaianic version.⁸³

Williamson,⁸⁴ following Wildberger⁸⁵ believes that the clause

יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ לֹא יָצָא הָעִיר הַתִּכְנָה ו was deliberately added here to emphasize the speed of the answer. On the other hand Sweeney, commenting on the narrative in the book of Isaiah, asserts that "By eliminating the reference to Isaiah's intended departure from the inner court and emending 'return' to 'go', the writer of Isa 38, 4f. emphasizes that YHWH's response to Hezekiah's prayer in v. 2f. occurred immediately, not while Isaiah was leaving."⁸⁶ However, the text as it now stands in Kings is more graphic and dramatic, showing Isaiah as having just left the king's presence and doing an about turn quickly afterwards. Sweeney's point is mitigated by the command "Go" (הֵלֹךְ Isa. 38:5). It suggests that the prophet is no longer with the king, and for all that the reader knows, there may have been a delay between the prayer and YHWH's command to Isaiah. "Return" (שׁוּב 2 Kgs 20:5) suggests a more recent encounter between prophet and king. In both Kings and Isaiah it

⁸³ בֵּית יְהוָה and נְגִיד־עַמִּי are missing in Is. 38:5. Williamson ("Temple", p. 52) believes that the latter phrase has been excised because of the inclusion of the psalm of Hezekiah. He asserts that Hezekiah's restoration is seen in Isaiah "typologically as adumbrating the restoration of the community, and of the royal line in particular, characterized by worship in the house of the Lord. In this new context, the reference to a single visit to the temple by the king alone as a sign of restoration would have been inappropriate." Similarly, Konkel ("Sources", p. 479) regards the removal of the promise of individual healing for the king as being in accord with the emphasis in Isaiah on the deliverance of king and city together. Sweeney (*Isaiah 1-4*, p. 14) believes that the shorter Isaiah text means that any indication of delay, such as going up to the temple on the third day, is eliminated. He adds, "Furthermore, the removal of the reference to God's healing Hezekiah deemphasizes a potential motivation for Hezekiah's piety."

⁸⁴ H.G.M. Williamson, "Hezekiah and the Temple", in Michael V. Fox et al. (eds.), *Texts, Temples and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), pp. 47-52 (49).

⁸⁵ Wildberger, *Jesaja 28-39*, p. 1446.

⁸⁶ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4*, p. 14. According to Augustus Konkel ("The Sources of the Story of Hezekiah in the Book of Isaiah" *VT* 43 [1993], pp.462-482 [479]) the reason for this omission and others is the addition of the psalm of Hezekiah in the Isaianic account. He argues that "The story now focused less on the particulars of the event and more on the

seems natural to assume that Isaiah left the king's presence after delivering the first oracle, but the narrative in Kings is more suggestive of an immediate return.

Several theological issues are raised by the response of YHWH in this v. 5 including the question as to whether God changes his mind, and connected with this the effectiveness or otherwise of prayer in bringing about such a change. Furthermore, there is the question of whether Hezekiah's claimed righteous deeds have any influence upon God in the decision he makes.

Reading these verses as a narrative suggests that here is one of the clearest instances in the Bible of God changing his mind, an example of divine repentance, although the usual term, *נָחַם*, is not found.⁸⁷ Despite the absence of the term *נָחַם*, the definition given by Wolff of *נָחַם יְהוָה עַל* ("to repent concerning") neatly sums up God's apparent action here. According to Wolff, the phrase "designates a change of mind prompted by the emotions, a turning away from an earlier decision on the part of someone deeply moved."⁸⁸ The primary concern of this study is with the character of Hezekiah and especially the way in which he is characterized as an exemplar of faith, but that faith is placed in another character in the narrative, of YHWH himself. The interaction of characters and the effects that they may have on one another are important in reading the text narratologically and help our understanding of the depiction of the main character.

Fricke asks the questions: "Kann Gott sein Wort so schnell und leicht zurücknehmen? Ist Gott nicht an sein Wort gebunden, und verliert dies nicht dann, wenn er es wieder zurücknehmen kann, an Glaubwürdigkeit?"⁸⁹ Fricke asserts that God can take back his word; he is

words of Yahweh through the prophet, and their significance for life and hope."

⁸⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, "The Repentance of God: A Key to Evaluating Old Testament God-Talk", *HBT* 10 (1988), pp 27-70 (54).

⁸⁸ Hans Walter Wolff, *Joel and Amos* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), p. 298.

⁸⁹ Fricke, *Königen*, p. 286.

free to use his own will and judgement, the best proof of this being found in the book of Jonah. Fricke continues by arguing that the pious Israelite has tried to discover a rule in God's behaviour that leaves his sovereignty intact. He found it, according to Fricke, in the fact that a prophecy of doom can always be withdrawn, but the oracle of salvation must be fulfilled. God's behaviour is seen to spring from his will to save and thus God loses no credibility if he withdraws threatened punishment.⁹⁰ It will be shown below that God does change his mind at times, especially in responsiveness to the prayers of his people, but Fricke here seems to assume that the oracle given by Isaiah in 20:1 is a prophecy of punishment, which implies sinfulness on the part of Hezekiah. It is not clear that Hezekiah has sinned in which case the prophecy may be seen as a gracious forewarning on God's part. Furthermore, whilst Fricke is no doubt correct in saying that God may withdraw threats of judgement, he does not seem to have considered a passage such as Jer. 18:9-10 in the famous narrative regarding the potter and the clay, where the reverse is also a possibility: "And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will repent of the good which I had intended to do to it." As Moberly has noted in his comments on divine "repentance" not only is there the story of Jonah illustrating God's "repentance" of sending judgement in response to a turning from evil, but "The converse, God's 'repentance' of promised good in response to human wrongdoing, is equally illustrated (Gen 6:5-8; 1 Sam 2:27-30; 15:1-35)."⁹¹

With regard to the possibility of God changing his mind, the following comments from Miller's study on the theology of biblical prayer may be helpful:

"The responsiveness of God to human intercession suggests an

⁹⁰ Fricke, *Königen*, p. 287.

⁹¹ R.W.L. Moberly, "'God Is Not a Human'", p. 114.

openness within the nature and work of God that raises some problems for our theological conceptuality but is consistently what we encounter in the Scriptures, that is, that God is not a way of speaking about a determined or deterministic universe where everything is forever fixed. While reality is a whole, and the nexus of cause and effect is not something that one can claim for a while and then let go willy-nilly, intercessory prayer, as we find it in the Bible, suggests there is some freedom and openness within God's providence, which is nevertheless reliable and not capacious (sic - capricious?). Indeed, that is demonstrated by what we find with intercessory prayer in that it seems to have its effects on God as it makes its petitions consistent with the nature and activity of God... We speak of participating in the work of God, so that in some fashion the work of God is mediated through human creatures. That participation can also take the form of prayer, so that God incorporates human prayers into the dynamic, nonstatic, purposive divine activity. That may mean that at times it appears as if prayer is changing God's mind. As we have seen, the biblical prayers do just that, according to the story. But if there is a responsiveness, what happens is within the larger purposes of God, and the prayers of the leaders, the servants, and also of the people are part of the stuff with which God shapes the future. Nowhere is it more apparent than in these prayers of intercession that prayer is a genuine dialogue and makes a difference."⁹²

Although Miller's comments refer particularly to intercession, i.e. prayer on behalf of others, they are also remarkably pertinent to Hezekiah's prayer. As is the case with Moses praying for the people of Israel (Ex. 32) or Abraham interceding on behalf of the hypothetical righteous citizens of Sodom (Gen. 18), Hezekiah has a double-edged faith; he believes that God's essential nature, his love and his faithfulness, will not change, but at the same time that God may be persuaded to reverse his pronouncement of impending death. Concerning the plea of Moses, it is clearly shown that YHWH changes his mind and that this is not just anthropopathic language. God is seen to relent, not because of repentance on the part of

⁹² Miller, *They Cried*, p. 280. See also his comments on Ezek. 22:30-31 where he categorically states, "Prayer can change God's mind" (p. 277). Compare Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective" in Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders et al. (eds.), *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), pp. 11-58. In a recent work, Thomas Weinandy (*Does God Suffer?* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 2000], p. 63 n. 31) has sought to defend the doctrines of the ontological immutability and the impassibility of God. He admits, however, that this is not possible to do solely on biblical grounds and that philosophical argument must be invoked in order to answer objections to these doctrines.

the Israelites, but in direct response to Moses' prayer.⁹³ That God is essentially and unchangeably love (in the Old Testament especially characterized by his רַחֻם), but that his immediate intentions can be changed, is the basic, though often unperceived, presupposition of petition in the Judaeo-Christian tradition. As Rice states with reference to the intercession of Moses: "(God's) ultimate objectives required him to change his immediate intentions."⁹⁴ As regards Hezekiah, it appears that here is another example of YHWH changing his mind in response to prayer. Fretheim has argued persuasively that the metaphor of divine "repentance" is one of high revelatory capacity. It fulfils a controlling function, delimiting other metaphorical possibilities. As a metaphor drawn from interpersonal relationship, it has a large capacity "...to capture, illuminate, organize, and communicate our experience and understanding of God (or anything else), to focus our thinking, feeling, and acting with respect to our life experience."⁹⁵ It is pervasive throughout the Old Testament and found in different traditions both northern and southern, early and late.⁹⁶ In his theological consideration of divine "repentance", Fretheim concludes that the concept is not something unusual in the Old Testament. It speaks of a God affected by his creation, "a God who has chosen to enter into relationship with the world such that it is a genuine relationship."⁹⁷

⁹³ Rice, *Biblical Support*, p. 28. See also Miller, *They Cried*, p. 277.

⁹⁴ Rice, *Biblical Support*, p. 28.

⁹⁵ Fretheim, "Repentance", pp. 52-53.

⁹⁶ Fretheim, "Repentance", pp. 53-57.

⁹⁷ Fretheim, "Repentance", p. 59. See also Moberly, "'God Is Not a Human'", pp. 112-123. In discussing the narrative concerning Jeremiah at the potter's house (Jer. 18:1-12) Moberly draws attention to the paradoxical formulation (vv. 7-10) which follows the potter and clay imagery. The notion of the absolute sovereignty of the creator over his creation is juxtaposed to the concept of divine responsiveness to human action (p. 114). Karl Barth (*Church Dogmatics* III [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957], pp.494-499) has also commented upon the "repentance" of God, although he prefers to speak of constancy rather than immutability in relation to the deity. God may repent of warnings and judgements or, if necessary, of promises of help, "But He cannot and never does repent of being the One He is" (p. 498).

The question as to whether God has regard to Hezekiah's righteous actions must also be considered. Fricke asks whether God has heard Hezekiah because he is a righteous man.⁹⁸ His answer is that God appears to go along with Hezekiah, but in fact makes no direct mention of Hezekiah's righteousness; God simply says that he has heard his prayer and seen his tears, rather than his righteous acts. Fricke explains God's action on the grounds that Hezekiah had confidence in God and that it was this which was counted as righteousness. Not surprisingly, Fricke refers to Gen. 15:6. He continues with what would appear to be an exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, strongly emphasizing that it was God's righteousness which was given to Hezekiah and that the king's prayer was heard for the sake of God's own name.⁹⁹ This move by Fricke is unnecessary and imprecise in light of the fact that Hezekiah has clearly shown himself to be in a covenant relationship with God. While it is true that Hezekiah is especially portrayed in 2 Kgs. 18-19 as a man who trusts in God, there is nothing in the text here that indicates that Hezekiah's prayer is answered solely on that basis. Faith is involved in the sense that Hezekiah's deeds give evidence of his faith in God, but the plain sense of the text is that Hezekiah's inward disposition and his outward behaviour are commensurate with what is expected of a vassal by his suzerain bound by a covenant. In such a case the suzerain is honour bound to act on the vassal's behalf. It is true, as Fricke implies, that YHWH does not refer to the content of Hezekiah's prayer, just to his act of praying and weeping, but on the other hand there is nothing to suggest that God does not accept the content of the prayer as being truthful. God's hearing of the prayer suggests that he is at least sympathetically mindful of its contents, if not in full agreement.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Fricke, *Königen*, p. 287.

⁹⁹ Fricke, *Königen*, pp. 287-288.

¹⁰⁰ Michael L. Brown (*Israel's Divine Healer* [SOTBT; Carlisle: Paternoster Press,

The Prince of my People

The titles or epithets which are bestowed upon the various characters in the narrative help to clarify their role and may have theological significance. In most of 2 Kgs. 20 Hezekiah is without any title such as “king”; this may be to focus the reader’s attention on the man rather than on his position. At the beginning of this narrative it seems that he is to be seen simply as a mortal, no different from any other human being who is prone to sickness and the frailties of the flesh. Yet, after God has indicated his change of heart and has heard the prayer of Hezekiah, Hezekiah is no longer just any man, but he is regarded by YHWH as “the prince of my people”.¹⁰¹ The role of rulership that seemed to slipping from Hezekiah’s grasp because of the Damoclean sword of a fatal prognosis against him is seen to be re-established.

The definition of the term נָגִיד and the extent of its differentiation from the term מֶלֶךְ has caused some debate. נָגִיד has been variously delineated as a particular time in the career of an officer-holder’s tenure or as referring to a particular aspect of authority.¹⁰² Its significance here is probably that it is a term that hints at “God’s special concern for the dynasty of David”.¹⁰³ In the narrative where YHWH makes a covenant with David YHWH tells Nathan to say to David: “Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince (נָגִיד) over my people Israel” (2 Sam 7:8). Hezekiah is

1995], p.326, n. 247), refers to Hezekiah’s righteous conduct as “relative righteousness”, and compares it with the godly living of the psalmist as in, for example, Ps. 18:20-27.

¹⁰¹ Williamson (“Temple”, p. 49), however, seems to regard the title as detracting from a “strongly positive portrayal of the king” and as this was the kind of portrayal required in the book of Isaiah, according to Williamson, it was consequently omitted.

¹⁰² See, e.g., James W. Flanagan, “Chiefs in Israel”, *JSOT* 20 (1982) pp. 47-73 (67-68).

¹⁰³ Nelson, *Kings*, p. 244.

probably being identified with his ancestor, David,¹⁰⁴ and is seen to be fulfilling his proper role as a Davidic king within the stipulations of the covenant. What does seem to be clear is that the נָגִיד always succeeded to the throne.¹⁰⁵ It speaks of a position of authority and of a leading role in society. Here it also serves to indicate that Hezekiah is to be rehabilitated to his royal position.

The phrase, “my people”, is a reminder that Hezekiah is not the ultimate sovereign over the Judahites, but that he is vice-regent for YHWH who is the true king. The phrase is found several times in Exodus in the imperative: “Let my people go”, but also occurs four times in 2 Sam. 7 (vv. 7, 8, 10, 11) and is also scattered throughout Samuel and Kings.¹⁰⁶ The people whom Hezekiah rules belong to YHWH; they were chosen by him. The use of the phrase in connection with David further underlines the portrayal of Hezekiah as the new David.

The God of your Ancestor David

YHWH is given the title “the God of your ancestor David”, clearly demonstrating the importance of the Davidic dynasty in the narrative and emphasizing YHWH’s covenant relationship with David. The phrase “God of your father(s)” is comparatively rare when it is followed by a proper noun in apposition. The only people apart from David¹⁰⁷ to be mentioned in such phrases are Abraham,¹⁰⁸ Isaac¹⁰⁹ and Jacob.¹¹⁰ Comparison might be made with the way that YHWH addresses Moses as

¹⁰⁴ G.F. Hasel, “נָגִיד”, *TWAT*, V, cols. 203-219 (215).

¹⁰⁵ Baruch Halpern, *The Constitution of the Monarchy in Israel* (HSM, 25; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ 1 Sam. 2:29; 9:16, 17; 2 Sam. 3:18; 5:2; 1 Kgs. 6:13; 8:16; 16:2;

¹⁰⁷ Found here and Isa. 38:5 and 2 Chr. 21:12.

¹⁰⁸ Gen. 26:24; 28:13; Ex. 3:6, 15, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Gen. 28:13; Ex. 3:6, 15, 16.

¹¹⁰ Ex. 3:6, 15, 16.

the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob in Exod. 3:6, 15, 16. Admittedly, the situation in Ex. 3 is unique in that Moses and Israel are depicted as not knowing the name YHWH; it is there that the god who is known as the God of the three patriarchs is revealed as having a personal name.¹¹¹ In Kings the name of God is well known, yet with regards to both Moses and Hezekiah, God referring to his dealings with the person's forebears may give reassurance to the one addressed and at the same time suggest a theological linking with God's actions in the past. For Hezekiah the divine epithet implies a position of favour such as that enjoyed by his ancestor, David.

"On the third day" suggests that the action will take place in a short time, in contrast to the common phrase forty days. A journey of three days is a relatively short one in terms of transport in ancient times. Gradwohl is no doubt correct in considering as doubtful Driver's comment that a three days' journey was probably a current expression for a considerable distance.¹¹² In particular, Gradwohl sees the expression, third day, as signifying the high point of an event. Compare Gen. 22:4; 34:25; Ex. 19:11, 15-16; Hos. 6:2.¹¹³ Commenting on Hos. 6:2, Mackintosh sees "the reference to time and the number of days as part of the expression of hope... The phrase, then, reflects a rhetorical device and the sense is that in a short time the healing process will be complete and, restored to health, the sick man will rise from his bed to live out the rest of his life in the care and fellowship of God."¹¹⁴ The notion that the third day represents a short period of time is intensified further if the regulations of Lev. 13:4, 26, 31 were in operation at this time. A person with a boil would normally have to wait seven days before entering the temple.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ R.W.L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), pp. 12, 24-25.

¹¹² Roland Gradwohl, "Drei Tage und der Dritte Tag" in *VT* 47 (1997), pp. 373-378 (373).

¹¹³ Gradwohl, "Drei Tage", pp. 376-377.

¹¹⁴ A.A. Macintosh, *Hosea* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), pp. 221-222.

¹¹⁵ Vicki Hoffer, "An Exegesis of Isaiah 38:21", *JSOT* 56 (1992), pp. 69-84 (82).

20:6

It is clear that the promise of rescue is chronologically out of place, as both the city and the king were rescued in the preceding chapter. Attempts have been made to solve the problem by proposing that the verse contains glosses probably based on 2 Kgs. 19:34.¹¹⁶ Cogan and Tadmor rightly reject the notion of glosses, as it would be unlikely for someone to add the promise of deliverance when the defeat of the Assyrian army has already been reported. They consider it likely that the report of Hezekiah's illness originally preceded the account of Sennacherib's campaign and has subsequently been moved to its present position.¹¹⁷ Whether or not that is the case, the text as it has been received suggests that the twin themes of Hezekiah's recovery from sickness and Jerusalem's deliverance from the besieging Assyrians are closely connected. In addition to the almost verbatim repetition of 19:34 in v.6, there are several parallels which may be drawn between the two accounts. The king was at the point of death through sickness at about the same time as the city was at the point of defeat.¹¹⁸ A reversal of both situations is apparently effected through the intercession of Hezekiah (19:15-19; 20:3). YHWH responds positively to both prayers (19:20; 20:5-6). A confirmatory sign¹¹⁹ is involved in both cases, although in 19:29 it is given voluntarily on God's part, whereas in 20:8 Hezekiah asks for a sign and is given a choice between two signs. The result for Hezekiah personally is a life extended by fifteen years and for Jerusalem independence from foreign domination for a number of years.

The present narrative, like the previous one (2 Kgs.18:17-19:37), highlights YHWH's power and the importance of faith in YHWH. Using the same themes in adjoining stories suggests an emphasizing of the

¹¹⁶ See Montgomery, *Kings*, p. 507.

¹¹⁷ Cogan and Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 255.

¹¹⁸ Note the temporal expression in 20:1, בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם (In those days).

¹¹⁹ F.J. Helfmeyer (אֱלֹהִים, *TDOT* I, pp. 167-188 [185]) does not mention 2 Kgs. 19:29, but he categorizes the sign in 20:8-11 as a sign of confirmation. Such a sign may or may not be miraculous.

message that deliverance is wrought through trust in YHWH.

In 20:6 YHWH declares that he will defend Jerusalem for his own sake and for His servant, David's sake.¹²⁰ This may be to show that what God wants, including what is proper in view of YHWH's promises to David, and what Hezekiah desires coincide. This raises the question as to what were God's intentions in 20:1. The message which came from YHWH to Hezekiah via Isaiah may be seen either as an oracle of judgement, or as a gracious warning of the future. That Hezekiah had a boil may suggest that this infliction was a punishment for sin. Amongst the curses for disobeying YHWH in Deut. 28 is the following: "The LORD will smite you with the boils (שִׁחִי) of Egypt, and with the ulcers and the scurvy and the itch, of which you cannot be healed" (Deut. 28:27). One of Job's afflictions was to be covered with boils (שִׁחִי) (Job 2:7), which was taken to indicate his sinfulness by his comforters. If Hezekiah's boil was considered symptomatic of leprosy, then again this might be considered a form of retribution for sin. It has also been asserted by Hull that the use of the word חָלָה in v.1 indicates that Hezekiah has sinned. He argues that the use of this word is like a motif that is used elsewhere in the book of Kings in connection with kings who have sinned.

Several, such as Ahab and his sons, Ahaziah and Joram, are described as being sick or injured (חָלָה) before their deaths. Ahab was wounded in battle against Aram (1 Kgs. 22:34), Ahaziah fell through a lattice from an upper room (2 Kgs. 1:2) and Joram was wounded in battle against Aram

¹²⁰ לְמַעַן דָּוִד עַבְדִּי is lacking in Isa. 38. Mbuwayesango (*Defense of Zion*, pp. 143-144), believes it is more likely that the redactor of the Kings account has added the phrase "for the sake of David, my servant", than that it was deleted from Isaiah, as Kings is more likely to add "a Deuteronomistic characteristic". However, she makes no mention of the phrase "for my sake", possibly because there is no indication that it is Deuteronomistic in character. According to Mbuwayesango, in Isaiah, Hezekiah is seen as being saved by his own deeds, whereas in Kings the emphasis is laid upon it being for David's sake. Mbuwayesango may be guilty of making a false dichotomy, for Hezekiah is the living representative of the Davidic dynasty. It would be more reasonable to differentiate between the king and YHWH, yet as shown below this again would be a false dichotomy.

For an explanation of the meaning of the phrase "my servant David's sake" see pp. 101-103 above.

and killed by Jehu (2 Kgs. 8:29). Hull admits that in the case of Joram, death is not specified as being a result of his illness.¹²¹ Ben-Hadad, king of Aram,¹²² and Abijah, son of Jeroboam I,¹²³ are also cited as examples. Ben-hadad, after becoming ill, was assassinated by Hazael (2 Kgs. 8:7). Abijah fell ill (חָלָה) (1 Kgs. 14:1, 5) and his death was announced along with the demise of Jeroboam's house by the prophet Ahijah (1 Kgs. 14:12, 17). The only king of Judah who is cited is Asa, but again his death is not specifically connected to his diseased feet, nor does his death signify the end of a royal dynasty.¹²⁴ Hull's argument is weakened by the fact that some deaths are not directly attributable to sickness and that Asa's death does not end the Davidic dynasty. It is true that Ahab, for example, is clearly stated to be sinful,¹²⁵ and that other kings are shown as doing what is unacceptable,¹²⁶ but there is no clear statement that Hezekiah has sinned. Hull mentions that Elisha the prophet becomes sick, but makes no comment about it even though he dies as a direct result of that sickness (2 Kgs. 13:14). Of course, Elisha is not a king, but if such a prominent character were depicted as being sick, it would not be unreasonable to look for a sin, given Hull's proposition. None is evident, but interestingly, the story of the resurrection of a dead man thrown on top of Elisha's bones might suggest the opposite (2 Kgs. 13:21).

Although sickness (חָלָה) may be associated with sin and viewed as a punishment for sin at times in the book of Kings, it is not the case that every sick person is being punished for sin, not even if they happen to be kings.¹²⁷ Brown notes that while most cases of healing in the Pentateuch

¹²¹ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 459 n. 21.

¹²² His sickness is mentioned in 2 Kgs. 8:7 and the prediction of his death in 8:10.

¹²³ 1 Kgs. 14:1 and 14:12

¹²⁴ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 459.

¹²⁵ 1 Kgs. 16:30.

¹²⁶ E.g., Ahaziah consults Baalzebub, the god of Ekron (2 Kgs. 1:2).

¹²⁷ It is interesting that Talmon does not see an automatic link between sin and the root חָלָה. See Shemaryahu Talmon, "The Textual Study of the Bible - a New Outlook" in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* (eds. Cross, Frank Moore and Shemaryahu Talmon; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975) pp. 321-400 (331), where he states that "...חָלָה usually refers to any illness which affects man in the course of nature (cp. e.g. Gen. 48:1; 1 Sam. 19:14; 30:13; 1 Kgs 14:15; 15:23, 17:17; 2 Kgs 8:7, 29; Neh. 2:2 et al.)..."

are reversals of the effects of divine judgment, the four principal accounts of physical healing involving the prophets in Kings (besides Hezekiah they are the widow's son in Zarephath 1 Kgs 17:17-24, the Shunammite's son 2 Kgs 4:8-36, and Naaman 2 Kgs 5) do not involve people who are described as being ill because of sin.¹²⁸

It is true that if it could be shown that Hezekiah had sinned and that his boil is evidence of divine punishment, then the statement "you shall die" would be seen as a judgement and the subsequent change of God's mind would be seen as an act of grace. Hezekiah might then be compared with Ahab who shows remorse over his sin and finds the pronouncement of judgement lifted from him through postponement (1 Kgs. 21:27-29). In such circumstances, the petition of Hezekiah would be seen as a desperate, effort to gain attention from YHWH. However, there is no overt mention of sin made here and the prayer of Hezekiah makes no mention of repentance.¹²⁹ Whether Hezekiah has sinned is not the point that is being made. The way the incident is portrayed is that Hezekiah happened to find himself struck down. No reason is given. If it was because the author believed Hezekiah to have sinned, it is strange that the point is not mentioned. It seems clear that sin is not the issue here. The statement in v. 1 about Hezekiah being sick is extremely economical in the number of words used, as is the message from YHWH through Isaiah to the king. The attention is focused upon Hezekiah and his reaction to the situation.¹³⁰ YHWH could foresee that the illness would result in Hezekiah's death, so in his wisdom and mercy YHWH forewarned the king that he would die because of this affliction. It may be that YHWH did this to challenge Hezekiah to trust him in greater measure and thus increase his faith that he might face the enemy more boldly and/or that Hezekiah might be seen by his people as an example of faith and that by the king's healing the population of Jerusalem might be encouraged to also put their trust in

¹²⁸ Brown, *Healer*, pp. 92,105. The term *תלך* is used in reference to the widow's son (1 Kgs. 17:17).

¹²⁹ Hull (Hezekiah, p. 460) refers to Hezekiah's "penitence", but it is hard to find anything in Hezekiah's prayer that could be understood as penitence.

¹³⁰ It is also very noticeable that YHWH's second message (vv. 5-6) is much longer than

YHWH.¹³¹The Relationship between v. 7 and vv. 8-11

The relationship between v. 7¹³² and vv. 8-11 is one that has produced much debate. The problem is noticeable even in a cursory reading, if the MT is followed. Hezekiah is said to have recovered through what might be described as a folk remedy, the application of a poultice of figs (v. 7). Yet in the next verse Hezekiah is depicted as asking Isaiah what the sign will be that YHWH will heal him and that he will be able to go to the temple. He does not ask for a sign as such, but assumes that one will be provided. He seems to take it for granted that some sort of sign will precede or accompany the healing. (This incidentally also indicates that the enquiry regarding a sign does not suggest a lack of faith on Hezekiah's part.) If וַיִּרְיֵן in v. 7 is read as waw consecutive with the imperfect (and thus, the verse ends with "and he recovered"), vv. 8-11 seem to be out of place or totally unnecessary. Multifarious suggestions have been made to obviate the difficulty caused by the juxtaposition of v. 7 and vv. 8-11.

First, the last word of v. 7 (וַיִּרְיֵן) which is pointed as a waw consecutive with the imperfect could be pointed as a jussive, as it is in the corresponding verse in Isa. 38:21.¹³³ This would involve a resumption of speech by Isaiah after a brief interruption by narrative. However, Hull argues that the jussive reading is probably an attempt at harmonization.¹³⁴

the first and the implication seems to be that this is what YHWH really desired.

¹³¹ *The Amplified Bible* ([Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965], p. 456) suggests that Hezekiah should have accepted God's warning of imminent death as God's will and thereby avoided the birth of Manasseh, who is judged to be a particularly loathsome king in the book of Kings. It seems to be forgotten that this would have meant the end of the Davidic dynasty and that not only would there have been no Manasseh, but also no Josiah, the great reformer. It suggests that it is wrong to pray for God to change his mind when clearly this was done by Abraham and Moses.

¹³² A parallel to this verse is found in Isa. 38:21 but with some differences. It is also in a different position in the narrative, after the psalm of Hezekiah (38:10-20).

¹³³ Cf. the LXX of 2 Kgs 20:7 which reads καὶ ὑγιαίνει. See BHS ad loc.

¹³⁴ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 448. E. Ruprecht ("Die ursprüngliche Komposition der Hiskia-Jesaja-Erzählungen und ihre Umstrukturierung durch den Verfasser des deuteronomistischen Geschichtswerkes" *ZTK* 87 [1990] pp. 33-66 [39]), however, is a modern example of a scholar who accepts this reading.

Williamson urges resistance to such harmonization, arguing that “The climactic ‘and he recovered’ forms an effective contrast to the ‘you shall not recover’ in v. 1, so that vv. 1-7 may be taken as a self-contained narrative unit as they stand...”¹³⁵

Secondly, some scholars believe that v. 7 was part of an original kernel, which was later expanded by an interpolation, which caused the problem.¹³⁶ On the other hand, thirdly, it can be argued that v. 8 may appear to follow naturally after v.6 and that, therefore, v. 7 is seen as a later interpolation.¹³⁷ Fourthly, as noted by Kasher, many modern commentaries view vv. 1-7 and vv. 9-11 as distinct textual traditions that have been joined together by v. 8.¹³⁸

Yet, even if v. 7 were a later gloss, the fact is that it is now part of the scriptures as used in the synagogue and church. It calls for some interpretation, rather than being simply disregarded as a gloss. It is reasonable to accept that 20:1-11 is a composite narrative and that the editor has juxtaposed v. 7 and vv. 8-11 for some reason.¹³⁹ Several solutions have been proposed in relation to the verse as part of the canonical text.

¹³⁵ Williamson, “Temple”, p. 50.

¹³⁶ Alexander Rofé (*The Prophetic Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible* [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1988], p. 137-138) argues that there was an original short version consisting of v. 1 and v. 7; vv. 2-6 were added later and then vv. 8-11. Gonçalves, (*L'expédition*, p. 332-336) sees 20:1-11 as an expansion of a kernel (v.1abα+v.7) by interpolating 1bβ and 8-11; he is followed by McKenzie, *Trouble with Kings*, pp. 106-7 and Knoppers, “Incomparability”, p. 421. Würthwein (*I Kön. 17-2 Kön. 25*, pp. 432-35), sees v. 6 and vv. 8-11 as additions.

¹³⁷ Cf. NJPS, which places the verse in parentheses. See also J. Zackovitch, “2 Kings 20:7, Isaiah 38:21-22” (Hebrew), *Beth Mikra* 50 (1972), pp. 302-305 with English summary on p. 382. Zackovitch concludes that v. 7 is a later addition due possibly to the influence of the Elisha stories, as do Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 255). Hobbs (*2 Kings*, p. 287) however, argues that this is not sufficient reason for viewing the image found in v. 7 to be secondary. Sickness is a common motif, but so is recovery (Hobbs, p. 287). It is also the case that the equivalent verse in Isaiah (38:21) has been written in the margin by a hand different from the main text. Conversely, this could easily be an example of haplography as both v.21 and v.22 begin with the same word (וְהָאֱמֶרֶךְ) as noted by Hess (“Hezekiah”, p. 32 n. 32).

¹³⁸ See Rimon Kasher, “The *Sitz im Buch* of the Story of Hezekiah’s Illness and Cure (II Reg 20,1-1; Isa 38,1-22), *ZAW* 113 (2001), pp. 41-55 (45) and further references given there.

First, Hull has proposed a solution by interpreting the verbs **חִיָּה** and **רָפָא** in different ways.¹⁴⁰ He notes that the two verbs alternate in this section; the pronouncement that the king will not recover (**חִיָּה**) (v. 1) in the first oracle is reversed by the application of the fig-cake (v.7). The second oracle (vv. 5-6) uses **רָפָא** and it is this word which Hezekiah takes up in his request to know the nature of the sign. Hull asserts that **חִיָּה** signifies physical recovery, while **רָפָא** refers to a restoring of a full relationship with YHWH. Hull seeks support for his interpretation of **רָפָא** in the article on this word by Stoebe,¹⁴¹ where various metaphorical uses are discussed. Yet Hull's interpretation does not carry conviction. For, although the word may have metaphorical meanings in certain places, the immediate context matters most. In the present context, even if healing of relationships might be involved, the primary reference would seem to be to physical recovery.¹⁴² It is also worth noting that **רָפָא** is used when either YHWH is speaking in the first person (v.5) or YHWH is the subject of the verb (v.8). This does not appear to be accidental, for in the qal of **רָפָא**, the subject is always God throughout the Old Testament with the exception of the present participle and the infinitive.¹⁴³ It is true that the piel and hiphil of **חִיָּה** can be used in the sense of someone restoring someone-else to health, but it is not often found with YHWH as subject.¹⁴⁴ Probably little significance attaches to the use of two different verbs. It was probably more natural to use the verb **רָפָא** when YHWH is subject or

¹³⁹ Williamson, "Temple", p. 50.

¹⁴⁰ Hull, *Hezekiah*, pp. 469-471.

¹⁴¹ H-J. Stoebe, "רָפָא", *TLOT*, III, pp. 1254-1259. On the meaning of **רָפָא** see also Klaus Seybold, *Das Gebet des Kranken im Alten Testament* (BZWANT, 99; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1973), pp. 28-29; Alan Kam-Yau Chan, Thomas B. Song and Michael L. Brown, "רָפָא", *NIDOTTE*, III, pp. 1162-1173; Michael L. Brown, "רָפָא", *TWAT*, VII, pp. 617-625; Brown, *Healer*, pp. 25-31.

¹⁴² It is interesting that Brown (*Healer*, pp. 30-31) feels that in our occidental mentality we tend to exaggerate the dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual, between, for example, healing and forgiveness. He asserts (p. 31), "The 'either physical or spiritual' dichotomy often seen in comments on OT verses with *rp* is extremely faulty."

¹⁴³ Klaus Seybold, *Kranken*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁴ However, Isa. 38:16 in the psalm of Hezekiah is one of these occurrences where the hiphil of **חִיָּה** of is used when Hezekiah is asking God to restore his health.

being petitioned and הִתְחַנֵּן when the narrative refers to Hezekiah recovering.

Secondly, Kasher suggests that the term וַיִּחְיֶה should be understood as “remaining alive” or “not dying” rather than being healed. “...Isaiah the Prophet succeeded through the use of the fig poultice to prevent a turn for the worse in the medical situation of Hezekiah.”¹⁴⁵ Hezekiah’s question in v. 8 then refers to complete healing or purification from his condition so that he might enter the temple. Again, this seems to be an attempt to evade the plain sense of וַיִּחְיֶה.

Thirdly, Hoffer reads the verse in the immediate literary context of Isa. 38 in a metaphorical way. Hezekiah’s sickness, prayer and deliverance are considered to be a reflection of the situation in Judah in 701.¹⁴⁶ Similar images of wounds and healing are noted by Hoffer in Isa. 1:5-6; 30:26; 53; 61:1.¹⁴⁷

Finally, it may be that here is an example of what Hess terms “the repetitive style of biblical narrative.”¹⁴⁸ The same event may be being described, but with different emphases. They do not seem to follow in chronological order.¹⁴⁹ Hess comments that “... the healing of v. 7 could occur after the events of vv. 8-11 without the narrator feeling it necessary to place v. 7 after 8-11. The New International Version’s incorporation of a pluperfect at the beginning of v. 8 is another way of doing something similar. It is grammatically permissible and seems to be what the author intended, since it is more likely that the author would compose a logical account than one which contradicts the expected order of the narrative.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Kasher, “Story”, p. 52

¹⁴⁶ Hoffer, “Exegesis”, pp. 75-80.

¹⁴⁷ Hoffer, “Exegesis”, p. 75.

¹⁴⁸ Hess, “Hezekiah”, pp. 39-40

¹⁴⁹ Williamson (“Temple”, p. 50) notes that the “expected order is, in fact, what we find in the Isaiah version, where a variant form of 2 Kgs 20:7 has been moved to the end of the account in Isa. 38:21.” Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 257) argue on this basis that the Isaiah version is later than the Kings version.

¹⁵⁰ Hess, “Hezekiah”, p. 40.

Provan also accepts that vv. 8-11 may "...represent a flashback to some undescribed moment before Isaiah's action",¹⁵¹ but he has one other suggestion to make: that the recovery in v. 5 was only a first step or a temporary remission. He continues thus: "If the latter interpretation is correct, then the king appears unwilling to believe that temporary remission will indeed lead to a complete recovery; he asks for a further sign."¹⁵² Yet it seems unwarranted to charge Hezekiah with an unwillingness to believe. The juxtapositioning of the two narratives as suggested by Williamson and Hess appears to be the most likely explanation. Comparison might be made with Jon. 3:5 where the actions of the Ninevites appear to be anticipatory of the fuller account which follows in 3:6-9.¹⁵³ Jon. 3:5 states, "And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them." Yet, the king's proclamation of a fast and the donning of sackcloth come in vv. 7-8.

The Boil

The precise nature of Hezekiah's sickness is not clear,¹⁵⁴ but the term used (רִיחַוֶּשֶׁת) is also found in Ex. 9 of the plague against Egypt, in Job 2 of the affliction suffered by Job, and in Lev. 13 of the skin diseases often referred to as leprosy.¹⁵⁵ It is commonly accepted that the skin diseases

¹⁵¹ Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), p. 264. Cf. Long, *2 Kings*, p. 237.

¹⁵² Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC), p. 264. Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 255) indicate that this is not a new interpretation. They state, "Medieval exegetes suggested distinguishing between Isaiah's act, performed out of sympathy for the ailing king and which only alleviated the suffering and the real cure, which was in God's hands (cf. Qimhi, Abarbanel, ad. loc.)."

¹⁵³ Furthermore, compare Isa. 7:1 (see p. 238 below) and 2 Kgs 2:1; Long (*2 Kings*, pp. 23-24) categorizes the latter as an "anticipatory thematic statement". It has also been called an "abstract"; see Berlin, *Poetics*, p. 102. See also H.C. Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), pp. 13-14.

¹⁵⁴ See Schneir Levin, "Hezekiah's Boil", *Judaism* 42 (1993), pp. 214-217. Bubonic plague, a throat abscess, urticaria, eczema, psoriasis, leucoderma, and tuberculosis are among the conditions which Levin discusses. He concludes that the illness was a feverish and long-standing one, and ended in a discharging abscess, possibly tuberculous. Margaret Barker ("Hezekiah's Boil", *JSOT* 95 [2001], pp. 31-42 [32]) argues that "...there are enough details to identify Hezekiah's illness as the bubonic plague."

¹⁵⁵ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 291.

mentioned in the Old Testament are not the same as Hansen's disease, which is what the term leprosy usually signifies in modern times.¹⁵⁶ However, what is of interest theologically speaking is not the precise nature of the disease, but its social and cultural effects. Insights gleaned from anthropology, especially medical anthropology, may be of help. Pilch has contrasted two different models that may be applied when interpreting biblical accounts of healing.¹⁵⁷ What he terms the biomedical model depends upon modern, scientific analysis of disease, whereas the "cultural" or "hermeneutic" model "holds that sickness becomes a human experience and an object of therapeutic attention when it becomes meaningful..."¹⁵⁸ This is seen by Pilch as a more suitable model for interpreting illnesses cross-culturally including those recorded in the Bible. He continues by analyzing the descriptions of the disease in Lev. 13 according to the two models, but it is the cultural model that is of greater interest for the present study. This cultural model highlights the fact that lepers in the Bible were considered to be unclean, were made to live outside the camp, and possibly suffered aversion or rejection.¹⁵⁹ Biblical leprosy was viewed as something which caused uncleanness,¹⁶⁰ and therefore, often social isolation and demotion from office. Hezekiah has taken on the role of a patient, and thus, his social identity has changed.

¹⁵⁶ See E.V. Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy' and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible", *PEQ* 107 (1975), pp. 87-105; John Wilkinson, "Leprosy and Leviticus: The Problem of Description and Identification", *SJT* 30 (1977), pp. 153-169 and "Leprosy and Leviticus: A Problem of Semantics and Translation", *SJT* 31 (1978), pp. 153-166; David P. Wright and Richard N. Jones, "Leprosy", *ABD*, IV, pp. 277-282.

¹⁵⁷ John J. Pilch, "Understanding Biblical Healing: Selecting the Appropriate Model", *BTB* 18 (1988), pp. 60-66. A revised version of this article is now to be found as ch. 3 "Selecting an Appropriate Model: Leprosy - a Test Case" in John J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), pp. 39-54.

¹⁵⁸ Pilch, "Biblical Healing", p. 60.

¹⁵⁹ Pilch, "Biblical Healing", p. 63.

¹⁶⁰ It is interesting that in the Gospel accounts of lepers being healed, that the lepers usually ask for cleansing rather than healing. See, for example, Mt. 8:1-4; Mk 1:40-45; Lk. 5:12-14.

He has turned from someone who is able to care for himself into someone who is dependent on others and seeks help and advice from others.¹⁶¹ But more than this, if his sickness is considered to be leprosy, it would mean removal from his office and his normal sphere of privilege and responsibility.¹⁶² If sickness has social consequences, the act of healing and restoration of health, may be seen to effect a reversal of the position and a rehabilitation to a former office. As Kleinman comments, "‘Cultural healing’ may occur when healing rites reassert threatened values and arbitrate social tensions. Thus therapeutic procedures may heal social stress independent of the effect they have on the sick person who provides the occasion for their use."¹⁶³

However, there may be something more here than one man’s personal well-being and his role in society. Pilch in an earlier article discusses the thesis propounded by Kleinman that there is a social reality between the person, a biological and social being, and the physical, non-human, reality of the material world, and that two elements are found in this social reality: social reality *per se* and a bridging reality or a "...‘symbolic reality’ that links the social and cultural world with the person."¹⁶⁴ Mary Douglas argues that the human body is a symbolic reality that is a kind of bridge between the personal world and the socio-cultural world. She believes that, "The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries that are threatened or precarious. The body is a complex structure. The functions of its

¹⁶¹ Jonathan Miller, *The Body in Question* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1978), p. 50.

¹⁶² Mary Douglas, "Sacred Contagion" in John F.A. Sawyer (ed.), *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas* (JSOTSup, 227; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), p. 100.

¹⁶³ Arthur Kleinman, *Patients and Healers in the Context of Culture* (Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1980), p. 82.

¹⁶⁴ John J. Pilch, "Biblical Leprosy and Body Symbolism", *BTB* 11 (1981), pp. 108-113 (109).

different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures. We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structures reproduced in small on the human body."¹⁶⁵ She also states, "Sometimes bodily orifices seem to represent points of entry or exit to social units, or bodily perfection can symbolize an ideal theocracy."¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, according to Pilch, openings on the skin suggest a risk to the holiness of the human body;¹⁶⁷ flaky skin and boils on the skin of the king may be seen as affecting the boundary of the body and symbolize the threats to the body politic. Douglas maintains that because the Israelites formed a minority which was constantly hard pressed, and because they believed that all bodily issues were polluting, "The threatened boundaries of their body politic would be well mirrored in their care for the integrity, unity, and purity of the physical body."¹⁶⁸ By applying such insights to the symbolic significance of Hezekiah's sickness and his body, Hobbs sees a reflection of the political and social reality. Thus, he concludes: "The fact that the skin of the king is affected by the sickness clearly reflects the attack on the limits of the society carried out by the Assyrians which reached the very gates of Jerusalem, but stopped there."¹⁶⁹ The king's sickness and recovery may be seen as a dramatic visual parable of the attack on Jerusalem and the deliverance wrought by YHWH. Again, just as the healing is limited in that Hezekiah will live for another fifteen years and then die, so the immunity of the city to foreign invasion is to be short-lived and the threat of Assyria will be replaced by the threat of the

¹⁶⁵ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), p. 115.

¹⁶⁶ Douglas, *Purity*, p. 4.

¹⁶⁷ Pilch, "Biblical Healing", p. 65.

¹⁶⁸ Douglas, *Purity*, p. 113.

¹⁶⁹ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 292.

Babylonians foreshadowed by the visit of Merodach-Baladan.¹⁷⁰

The Cake of Figs

It is difficult to know whether the cake of figs was seen as a folk medicine¹⁷¹ or whether it was regarded as a symbol of healing, intended to indicate that YHWH would complete the healing process.¹⁷² The rare term דִּבְלָה only occurs in stories connected with the life of David and Hezekiah,¹⁷³ so again a connection between the two is suggested. In particular the story of David and his meeting with an Egyptian servant is interesting in view of the vocabulary found in it which is common to 2 Kgs. 20. David came to Ziklag to find that the women and children, including his wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, had been taken captive by the Amalekites. After enquiring of YHWH by means of the ephod, David went in pursuit of the Amalekites. An Egyptian servant is found in the open country left behind because of sickness. The food he is given includes a piece of a cake of figs (דִּבְלָה; 1 Sam. 30:12). He had fallen ill (חָלָה) three days earlier (1 Sam 30:13). The Egyptian then helps David to find the Amalekites and thus David is able to rescue (נָצַל) his wives (1 Sam. 30:18). Fig cake is seen as helping recovery after three days of illness.¹⁷⁴ In view of the anthropological explanation above, it may be possible to understand the poultice of figs as symbolic of God's deliverance of the city.¹⁷⁵ No indication is given as to the identity of the "them" who are to take the fig cake and apply it to the boil. Perhaps they

¹⁷⁰ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 292.

¹⁷¹ See R.G. Willis, "Pollution and Paradigms", in David Landy, *Culture, Disease and Healing: Studies in Medical Anthropology* (New York: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 278-85 for modern examples of the use of poultices and similar folk remedies.

¹⁷² Cf. the use of oil in Jas 5:14.

¹⁷³ 1 Sam. 25:18; 30:12; 1 Chr. 12:41; 2 Kgs. 20:7 = Isa. 38:21. See Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 468 n. 49.

¹⁷⁴ Hull (*Hezekiah*, p. 468 n. 49; cf. pp. 461-2) makes the implausible suggestion that דִּבְלָה appears to be a symbol of YHWH's special protection of David and Hezekiah."

¹⁷⁵ In the context of Isaiah, Hoffer ("Exegesis", p. 79) suggests that the cake of figs is symbolic of ritual cure, a cure for the nation that is produced through the exile.

were the court physicians.¹⁷⁶

20:8

The parallel verse in the Isaianic account (Isa. 38:22) is somewhat briefer and found in a different position in the narrative, at the very end, almost as if it were some kind of afterthought. Kaiser, accepting the priority of Kings, opines that the abridgement was made "...in order to protect the king against any suspicion of an impious challenge to God."¹⁷⁷ In a similar vein Hobbs views the demanding of a sign by Hezekiah after the oracle promising his deliverance from his sickness had been pronounced, as an indication of "unbelief".¹⁷⁸ However, asking for a sign is not necessarily evidence of unbelief. Although the term אֱמוּנָה is not used in Gen. 15, it is interesting that after Abram is shown to have believed YHWH, he asks how he will know that he will possess the land. He is laid to one side through a deep sleep and the signs of the divine presence, the smoking pot and the flaming torch, pass between the pieces of the sacrificial animals. In Jdg. 6:17 when Gideon receives his call, he asks that YHWH (or the angel of YHWH) will show him a sign (אֵימֹתָ). The sign is apparently that fire sprang from a rock and consumed the meat and unleavened cakes which Gideon had prepared. Nothing here implies unbelief on Gideon's part; the sign is for confirmation as it is in the case of Abram in Gen. 15. Within the book of Isaiah, it is instructive to remember that Ahaz was commanded by YHWH to ask for a sign, but he refused.¹⁷⁹ It may be the intention of the redactor in the Isaianic narrative at least, to depict Hezekiah in a favourable light. Whilst Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, although commanded to do so, Hezekiah shows initiative,

¹⁷⁶ Levin, "Hezekiah's Boil", p. 217.

¹⁷⁷ Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, p. 400.

¹⁷⁸ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 296.

¹⁷⁹ Isa. 7:11-12.

which need not be understood as unfaithfulness. That the sign involves the steps of Ahaz (Isa. 38:8/2 Kgs 20:11) further underlines this contrast between Hezekiah and Ahaz.¹⁸⁰

Nelson has stated that "Hezekiah's request for a supporting sign is not presented as illegitimate in any way, nor does it indicate a blameworthy lack of faith on the king's part. He has already been offered one sign in 19:29. His request is simply part of the story-telling pattern, part of the rhythm of oracle reception. It gives the story a chance to throw the spotlight on God's immense power to respond to prayer."¹⁸¹ As Ackroyd notes, the sign underlines the importance of the recovery of Hezekiah.¹⁸² Whether it is to be seen as a stage in the idealization of Hezekiah is debatable, but this is clearly an event which is marked in a very significant way.

It is noteworthy that when Hezekiah asks for a sign to confirm YHWH's words, he mentions only the first two of YHWH's promises, namely, that YHWH will heal him and that he will go up to the temple.¹⁸³ It may be that the deliverance of the city is not Hezekiah's foremost concern at this moment. Alternatively, it may suggest that Hezekiah is not aware of, or does not share the narrator's understanding of, the symbolic significance of his illness and anticipated healing.

¹⁸⁰ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 393.

¹⁸¹ Nelson, *Kings*, p.244.

¹⁸² Ackroyd, "Interpretation", p. 164.

¹⁸³ In the Isaianic version of 2 Kgs. 20:5-6 there is no promise of going up to the temple on the third day, only the promises of the addition of the fifteen years of life and the deliverance of Hezekiah and the city from the hand of the Assyrian (Isa. 38:5-6). It is, therefore, the more remarkable that in the corresponding verse to 2 Kgs. 20:8 (Isa. 38:22) Hezekiah's only concern is to receive a sign confirming that he will ascend to the house of YHWH. The placing of v.22 in its present position in Isa. 38 may be connected to the fact that the psalm of Hezekiah also ends with the words *יְהוָה בֵּית* (Isa. 38:20).

The temple is an important feature in the Hezekiah narratives, as it is throughout the books of Kings. Hull asserts that the main principle underlying the structure of Kings is to do with the houses of David (his dynasty) and YHWH (the temple).¹⁸⁴ Hezekiah has been unable to go to the temple either for physical reasons, because of the severity of his illness, or for cultic reasons, because he may have been ritually unclean, or both. The temple appears to symbolize life and health. It may be being depicted as the opposite of death.

Hauge notes the apparent illogicality of the order of the narrative, in particular the overshadowing of the healing (v.7) by a seemingly unnecessary sign. Yet he seems content to read the narrative as it comes and notes that "the present composition defines the healing as connected with the ascension to the temple on the third day as the real problem of the story."¹⁸⁵ In the psalm which is found only in the Isaiah version (Isa. 38:9-20) there is a contrast between the living and those in Sheol, between life and death. Whereas the dead cannot praise God and cannot hope for his faithfulness (v. 18), the living thank God (v. 19). Hauge uses the material in Isa. 38 in his discussion of Ps. 68:21. He views the city or temple in contrast to death as a locality.¹⁸⁶ Going through the gates of Sheol is contrasted with Hezekiah seeing YHWH in the land of the living. Thus Hauge contends that "This describes a transition from death to life by local categories: moving from the realm of death into the temple."¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, he states that "In close correspondence with the included psalm of thanksgiving, the entering into the temple marks the opposite of

¹⁸⁴ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 145.

¹⁸⁵ Martin R. Hauge, "Some Aspects of the Motif 'The City facing Death' of Ps 68, 21", *SJOT* 2 (1988), pp. 1-29 (26).

¹⁸⁶ Hauge, "Motif", p. 24.

¹⁸⁷ Hauge, "Motif", p. 25.

descending into Sheol.”¹⁸⁸ It would not be surprising that the psalm found in the Isaianic version of the Hezekiah narratives reflects the opposition of Sheol and the temple. Even in 2 Kgs. 20 where no reference is made to Sheol, it is clear that the house of YHWH is identified with recovery to health and is symbolic of life, and hence the place where Hezekiah desires to be.

20:9-10

Taking the text as it is in the MT, the first part of v.9b reads as a statement of what has already happened, the shadow has moved forward by ten steps, intervals, degrees or paces (מַעְלוֹת). Most modern translations, however, take Isaiah’s words as a double question,¹⁸⁹ based on the Targum. Burney suggests emending הָלַךְ to הִלָּךְ¹⁹⁰ on the grounds that an alternative has been offered to Hezekiah judging by his reply in v.10.¹⁹¹ Montgomery suggests reading the verb as an infinitive absolute, which is used interrogatively.¹⁹² However, as Hull notes, just because Hezekiah suggests two alternatives, it does not follow that Isaiah must have posed a double question.¹⁹³ Hezekiah does not actually state a preference in any case, although, he no doubt implies it by his statement of the obvious, that it is easier for the shadow to advance than to retreat.

The word מַעְלוֹת has been understood in various ways, but its repetition in vv. 9-11 where it occurs seven times would suggest its importance. Suggestions as to its meaning include a sun-clock with a pointed pillar

¹⁸⁸ Hauge, “Motif”, p. 27.

¹⁸⁹ But cf. NRSV: “the shadow has now advanced ten intervals; shall it retreat ten intervals?” Similarly, Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 253) have “The shadow has moved ahead ten steps; can it return ten steps?”

¹⁹⁰ Cf. BHS ad loc.

¹⁹¹ Burney, *Notes*, p. 349.

¹⁹² Montgomery, *Kings*, p. 512.

¹⁹³ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 474. Cf. Nelson (*Kings*, p. 245), and Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 255), who are also willing to take the MT at face value.

upon a plinth reached by a flight of steps, the pillar casting its shadow upon the steps.¹⁹⁴ Gray, following the reading of Isa. 38:8 found in 1QIsa^a (עֲלִיַּת), suggests it was a building for astral worship which was introduced to the temple precinct by Ahaz.¹⁹⁵ However, many modern commentators dismiss the idea of a sundial or a special building. Clements, for example, asserts that the Hebrew term simply means “steps”, which is probably its usual meaning. He maintains that it refers to an outside staircase leading to a balcony or upper room.¹⁹⁶

Many of the signs in the Old Testament function as the confirmation of a promise or threat, and prefigure “...fulfillment by the affinity of its nature.”¹⁹⁷ That would seem to be the case here. The reversal of time would seem to indicate not just Hezekiah’s recovery, but the addition of fifteen years to his life. The sign suggests that the God who can reverse the march of time is more than able to lengthen the life of the king.¹⁹⁸ The use of the shadow may be seen as symbolic reinforcement of this. In the Old Testament “shadow” (צֶל) can refer to that which is fleeting (e.g. Job 8:9) or to divine protection (e.g. Psa. 57:2).¹⁹⁹ The reversing of the shadow indicates that Hezekiah’s end will be delayed. Perhaps the casting of the shadow is also a reminder that Hezekiah’s times are in YHWH’s hands and that he lives under the protection of his God. The exact nature of the מַעְלֹלֹת may be uncertain, but it is interesting that the same word is used of the steps of the temple. The request by Hezekiah for a sign was to confirm that YHWH would heal him and that he would ascend to the temple on the third day (20:8).

¹⁹⁴ Burney, *Notes*, p. 349.

¹⁹⁵ Gray, *I & II Kings*, p. 699.

¹⁹⁶ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 291. Similarly, Jones, *I and 2 Kings*, II, pp. 588-589.

¹⁹⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1974), p. 57.

¹⁹⁸ Nelson, *Kings*, p. 244.

¹⁹⁹ Ackroyd, “Interpretation”, p. 284 n. 26.

20:11

It is not clear as to what is the subject of the verb יִרְדֶּה. It is third feminine singular, whereas לַיָּל, which appears to be the only possible subject, is a masculine noun. “The sun” (שֶׁמֶשׁ), which is found in some translations including the RSV and the NRSV, is found twice in the corresponding verse in Isa. 38:8. Its insertion may be justifiable here as it is a feminine noun.

Isaiah is specifically designated as a prophet possibly as a reminder of his intermediary role in the narrative. The subject of the verb יִשָּׁב is not specified, but the implication is that it is YHWH, Isaiah having called upon him. Isaiah is the one who petitions YHWH rather than Hezekiah in this instance, probably since Isaiah is acting as YHWH’s representative and channel of communication regarding the sign. Again prayer is answered and the section ends with YHWH very definitely in charge, his sovereignty being manifested by his power over nature.

Conclusions

Three main characters are involved in this section: Isaiah, YHWH, and Hezekiah. The scene revolves mainly around the interaction between Hezekiah and YHWH. Isaiah’s role is largely that of an intermediary between the two main characters. The prophet’s actions are mostly concerned with communication (v. 1, v. 4, v. 7a, v. 9, and v. 11) and it is only in v. 7 that Isaiah is not depicted as the channel of communication between YHWH and Hezekiah.²⁰⁰ Although the king is said to have recovered in v. 7, the way that this verse has been placed in the narrative well before the end intimates that this is not the climactic action of this narrative and that even Hezekiah’s recovery is subordinated to the activity of YHWH.²⁰¹ Although Isaiah commands the obtaining and applying of the cake of figs on the boil, this is only one action in the middle of a scene where YHWH is shown to take the initiative and it is YHWH who

²⁰⁰ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 453.

²⁰¹ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 453.

confirms the promise of recovery by moving the shadow back in response to the cry of Isaiah. It is not stated whether Isaiah commands the use of the cake of figs in response to a command from YHWH or whether this was an accepted practice in such cases, but there is certainly no intimation that Isaiah is acting contrary to YHWH's will.

YHWH is shown to be sovereign over all the action of the scene. He communicates to Hezekiah through Isaiah that Hezekiah faces death and must set his house in order (v. 1). He changes his mind, not capriciously, but in gracious response to the petition of Hezekiah. YHWH commands Isaiah to turn back and announce his acknowledgement of the king's prayer, which is done with a series of verbs in the first person (vv. 5-6). What YHWH does will be for his own sake, and will also fulfil his covenantal obligations to David. It is not in contradistinction to what Hezekiah desires, but YHWH makes the point that he acts on his own terms. The sign, which YHWH offers Hezekiah through the prophet, is one that could only be performed by YHWH (vv. 9-11). The human actions of v. 7 that appear at first sight to bring about recovery are subordinated to the actions of YHWH.

Hezekiah is depicted as a man who is close to Isaiah, the man of God, but who is also seen to be close to God in that his own prayer is deemed to be effective without prophetic intercession. Although the king is ill, there is no clear statement that it is because of personal sin. As with Job, Hezekiah's sickness may have been permitted for a purpose that is not clear at the beginning of the narrative. Despite the fact that Hezekiah becomes a patient in this narrative, he is still very active in many ways. He does not accept the situation as if it were the status quo, but petitions YHWH asking him to remember his upright deeds and attitude (vv. 2-3).

The use of the verb זָכַר by Hezekiah implies that he hopes that God will act on his behalf. He turns his face to the wall, he weeps. These actions are acknowledged by YHWH, who confirms that he not only hears Hezekiah's prayer but also sees his tears.

Hezekiah exercises a double-edged faith in God: he believes in the essential nature of God as one who loves and is faithful, yet he believes that God may be persuaded to change his immediate intentions. The narrator seems to suggest that YHWH's ultimate aim is to spare Hezekiah, possibly to increase his faith in view of the siege of the Assyrians, or so that the people of Jerusalem may see what YHWH has done for their leader and learn to trust in YHWH. As Hull notes, Hezekiah is a man who is active and who must make choices.²⁰² He requests a sign, not because he is demanding proof, because of unbelief, as Hobbs maintains, but rather because he believes God. Quite possibly the narrator wants to emphasize the power of God. When offered the choice of the easier or harder option of moving the shadow forwards or backwards, the king decides for the more difficult miracle. Again, this does not have to be seen as a lack of faith on the king's part, but can be considered as Hezekiah's belief that YHWH is able to act in a miraculous way.

Not only is Hezekiah pictured as a man of action despite his illness, but also something of his inner character is revealed through his words. His devotion to YHWH is evidenced by his whole-heartedness and his walking before YHWH in אֱמֶת. His prayer includes phrases that reveal him to be a vassal in covenant relationship with his suzerain, expecting a reward on the grounds of his good deeds and faithfulness. His deeds are not outward acts contradicted by a selfish inner nature, but demonstrate

²⁰² Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 453.

wholeness. Hezekiah's words are in agreement with the narrator's description of him at the beginning of the narratives in 18:3-6. His trust in YHWH (18:5) is demonstrated by his acts of reform. Hezekiah's role is central in 20:1-11. When confronted by personal trial, he acts and prays and makes choices which are shown as springing from his close relationship with his God.

YHWH's reactions to Hezekiah also contribute to the way in which the king's character is portrayed in the narrative. YHWH responds positively both to the prayer of Hezekiah and to his request for a sign. He seems to accept that Hezekiah is a righteous man and grants him an extension of life, not only because of his uprightness, but because it suits his will. The language that YHWH uses indicates that Hezekiah is clearly regarded as a king in the Davidic mould. Hezekiah is regaled as "the prince of my people" (v. 5), YHWH is identified as "the God of David your ancestor" (v. 5), and YHWH will act "for my servant David's sake" (v. 6).

The present narrative may well have been included alongside the narrative regarding the siege and deliverance of Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 18:17-19:37) to emphasize YHWH's power and the importance of the role of faith. The destiny of king and city seem to be entwined together. The very body of the king may symbolize the city, the infection which afflicted the skin of Hezekiah reflecting the siege on the edge of Jerusalem. Both the life of Hezekiah and the life of the city are preserved for a time. In both narratives, Hezekiah is depicted as a man of faith and prayer. Through his actions and words, which spring from his faith, his physical body and the body politic are delivered.

Chapter Four - Exegesis of 2 Kings 20:12-21

Introduction

The narrative found in 2 Kgs. 20:12-21 falls into four distinct units. Verses 12-13 form a narrative summary without any dialogue. In v. 12 Merodach-baladan,¹ the king of Babylon, sends letters and a gift to a passive Hezekiah. Hezekiah takes an active role in v. 13 by showing his treasures and goods to the anonymous bearers of the letters and gift. Then in vv. 14-15 there is a dialogue, or rather, an interrogation of Hezekiah by Isaiah; the envoys are either not present or have already left for Babylon. The ellipsis regarding the Babylonians is left for the reader to fill in. Isaiah speaks first, and then Hezekiah replies. This happens twice. The third unit, vv. 16-19, again involves only Hezekiah and Isaiah. The prophet proclaims an oracle from YHWH (vv. 16-18), which as Nelson asserts, "...is the real center of attention."² Hezekiah is thus passive in vv. 16-18, but again this is followed by him taking an active role in v. 19, where he gives his response to the oracle. The dialogue begins in v. 14 with a question from Isaiah and ends with words of affirmation in v. 19 from Hezekiah. Thus, there is a balanced alternation of speech. That Hezekiah is the central character is evidenced by his presence throughout the narrative, and by the way in which his role alternates between one that is passive and one that is active. In each of the first three units, he plays a passive role at first, but then responds actively to the circumstances. The fourth unit (vv. 20-21), which has no parallel in the book of Isaiah, constitutes Hezekiah's death notice.

The portrait of Hezekiah in the present narrative may appear at first sight to be different from that depicted in the previous two narratives (2 Kgs. 18:13-19:37 and 20:1-11). Judging by the oracle that Isaiah brings, it may seem that Hezekiah is at fault either knowingly or unknowingly, and that judgement is due to fall on the kingdom of Judah because of Hezekiah's display of all the treasures of the kingdom. This interpretation has been accepted by certain scholars for various reasons. Gerbrandt, for example, understands Hezekiah's

¹ This is the form of the name found in a few manuscripts, most ancient versions and Isa. 39:1. Here the first part of the name is spelled מֶרֶדַּחְבַּלְדָּן. See BHS ad loc.

show of wealth to indicate the making or confirming of a treaty with Babylon. Isaiah, he believes, was against such alliances, and, therefore, pronounces an oracle of judgement as a punishment on Hezekiah.³ On the other hand, Kaiser views the oracle as punishment on Hezekiah because he perceives him to be arrogant.⁴ Yet again, Begg considers that Hezekiah's display of his treasures is tantamount to him being willing to hand over his wealth to the Babylonians, which in effect leaves YHWH out of the picture. Hezekiah's action is thus viewed as highly reprehensible by Begg, and deserving of judgement.⁵ Seitz, however, questions this kind of negative interpretation.⁶ He notes three problems with this supposedly straightforward reading in addition to the different depiction of Hezekiah. "First, the motivation for Hezekiah's decision to show the emissaries his treasure houses and storehouses is never stated explicitly".⁷ Secondly, he makes the related point that no link is made between the king's action and the oracle brought by Isaiah. As Seitz notes, "The exile is simply announced as a fact, once the prophet determines from the king *where* the envoys have come from and *what* they said."⁸ The third point observed by Seitz is the curious response of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs. 20:19 (Isa. 39:8). It might be argued that the first two points are arguments *e silentio*, but the onus lies on those commentators who see Isaiah's oracle as a judgement upon Hezekiah to explain the omissions regarding Hezekiah's motivation and specific sin, which might have led to such a judgement.

This section is tied to the previous one by the temporal connection, בַּעַת הַהִיא.⁹ It does not give precise chronological information (and is

² Nelson, *Kings*, p. 245.

³ Gerbrandt, *Kingship*, pp. 86-87.

⁴ Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, p. 412.

⁵ Christopher T. Begg, "2 Kings 20:12-19 as an Element of the Deuteronomistic History", *CBQ* 48 (1986), pp. 27-38 (32-33).

⁶ Sawyer (*Isaiah*, II, p. 40) also asserts that Hezekiah is not guilty of sin in this matter, but he does accuse him of "political error" (p. 41).

⁷ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 262.

⁸ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 262 (author's italics). As Mbuwayesango (*Defense of Zion*, pp. 175-176) has argued, it is doubtful that Isaiah's speech fits the category of prophetic judgement speech that is directed at an individual, because the transgression of the addressee is not made evident; Hezekiah is not accused of a particular sin. She also comments that the phrase, "the days are coming" (יָמִים בָּאִים) (v. 17) is not found in the general format of judgement speeches, but is typical of prophetic predictions regarding the future, whether good or bad.

⁹ The phrase is also found in 2 Kgs. 18:16. 2 Kgs. 20:12-19 may link thematically with

probably not meant to do so), but it shows that this narrative is connected in some way with what precedes. Just as the previous section began with the temporal connection בְּיָמֵי הֵהָם (20:1), and was seen to link with the deliverance of Jerusalem narrative in chs. 18-19, so here there may be further comment on, or interpretation, of those events.¹⁰

In the exegesis of 2 Kgs. 20:1-11, it was noted that Hezekiah's sickness and recovery were closely linked to the fortunes of the city of Jerusalem. In particular the extension of fifteen years of life promised to Hezekiah was seen to reflect the fact that Jerusalem was saved from the Assyrian siege, but just as death would come to Hezekiah after a delay of fifteen years, so judgement would eventually fall upon Jerusalem in due time. This theme of delayed judgement, of present deliverance but eventual exile, seems to be again reflected in the present narrative. The reign of Hezekiah has not completely reversed the threat of judgement, but has delayed it for a time; it will not come in Hezekiah's lifetime at least. In this respect it is worth noting the immediate context of chs. 18-20. In ch. 17 the fall of the northern kingdom is described and this is referred to again in 18:9-12. However, Judah is also mentioned in ch. 17. Samaria has fallen, but the prophetic warnings were to both Israel and Judah (17:13). Furthermore, after it is stated that only the tribe of Judah is left, there is the ominous statement that "Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs which Israel had introduced" (17:19). After the Hezekiah narratives, the fall of Jerusalem is predicted because of the sins of Manasseh (21:10-15). There is a strong impression given that judgement is due to fall on Judah, and as the present passage is examined, it seems that the writer is suggesting that Hezekiah is aware of this, and that, as will be seen especially in the interpretation of v. 19, he can only view the oracle given by Isaiah (vv. 16-18) as "good", because the awfulness of the exile is being delayed and he will be spared from seeing its effects.

18:14-16.

¹⁰ Ackroyd, "Interpretation", pp. 153-154.

The Visit of the Babylonians and Hezekiah's Display (20:12-13)

The narrative begins with what appears to be a harmless, or even auspicious, event. King Hezekiah is honoured with letters¹¹ and a gift from a foreign king. The king of this small state, which has been largely occupied by Assyrian forces, is apparently courted by the ruler of another important state, Babylon. The ostensible reason for the visit is the illness of Hezekiah.¹² The scene may seem almost touching, and the reader may be lulled into a false feeling of security, thinking that nothing but good can result from this cameo. The narrator paints an idyllic picture at the beginning to contrast dramatically with and emphasize the prophetic announcement of the exile (vv. 17-18). Yet, even within the first verse of the narrative, there is a hint that this story is not being unfurled just to produce esteem for Hezekiah. Merodach-baladan is described as the king of Babylon. This may be simply to identify what position he held, but it is noticeable that the epithet "king" is not used of Hezekiah in vv. 12-13 (where he is mentioned four times) either as a description or as a title. A descriptive phrase might well be redundant since Hezekiah has held the centre-stage in the previous narratives. However, the title, "King", might have been expected here as the envoys from one head of state bring letters and a gift to another head of state. The absence of the title suggests that Babylon is not paying tribute to, or submitting to, Judah and is possibly proleptic of the fact that one day Babylon will be the subjugating power over Judah. It is true that Merodach-baladan, on the other hand, is not given the title "King", only described as "the king of Babylon", probably because he is a foreign king, and is not accorded such respect due to the bias of the narrator.

Some commentators suggest that Hezekiah's response to the envoys in displaying his treasures was either wrong or foolish. It may be worth comparing the records of previous visits to kings in the books of Samuel and Kings to see how other kings reacted and whether there is any narratorial comment upon their reactions. This should be instructive in assessing

¹¹ Burney (*Notes*, p.351) suggests emending the MT to סְרִיסִים (eunuchs), but this seems unnecessary and is without manuscript support.

¹² In 2 Chron. 32:31 the reason given is that the envoys were sent to enquire about the sign which had been performed in Jerusalem.

Hezekiah's response to the Babylonians envoys. Embassies from foreign kings recorded in the Old Testament include the visit of Hiram's servants to Solomon after Solomon's succession to the throne.¹³ This results in an apparently fruitful relationship from Solomon's point of view and peace (שָׁלוֹם) between the two of them.¹⁴ Comparison might also be drawn between the embassy of the Babylonians and that of the visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon. Provan comments that things are not the same as in Solomon's day: Jerusalem is no longer seen as the home of the wise and wealthy Solomon with his great material resources. He continues, "The clock has not been turned back that far, not even for David's greatest successor. In these days, foreigners surveying Jerusalem's splendour do not simply marvel. Now we expect them to return with hostile intent."¹⁵ It may be true that Jerusalem is no longer the capital of a prosperous kingdom, but there seems to be no reason why Hezekiah should be suspicious of his visitors because of, or in contrast to, the story of the visit of the queen of Sheba.

There is one story, however, which might suggest that a visit of a foreign delegation should be regarded with suspicion. That is the incident in which David's men went with apparent sincerity to Hanun, king of the Ammonites, to offer David's condolences on the occasion of his father's death (2 Sam. 10:1-5). The princes of the Ammonites argue that David is not interested in honouring Hanun's father, but in spying out the city in order to overthrow it. In this case, it was the foreign king who judged the intentions of David suspiciously and sent David's messengers packing in an ignominious way. It might be argued that if Hezekiah had known or remembered this story, he might have shown more wisdom or discernment when the Babylonian envoys came with their messages of sympathy, but, on the other hand, the king with the suspicious mind was not a Judahite monarch.

Within the Hezekiah narratives, however, there is another kind of "embassy" which has come to Jerusalem. It is interesting to compare and contrast the Babylonian envoys with the Assyrians (2 Kgs. 18:17). Both the Babylonians

¹³ 1 Kings 5:15 (5:1).

¹⁴ 1 Kgs. 5:16-26 (5:2-12).

¹⁵ Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC), pp. 264-265.

and the Assyrians have been sent by their king. The Babylonian messengers are nameless, whereas the Assyrians are revealed as the Tartan, the Rabсарis and the Rabshakeh backed by a large army. Possibly, the names of the Babylonians are not considered to be important, if they are being used as typological of future Babylonian invaders. The Assyrians never manage to gain entry to the city, whereas the Babylonians not only enter, but also are shown everything that is worth seeing. The words of the Assyrian Rabshakeh are stated at length, but not a word from a Babylonian messenger is given in the narrative summary at the beginning, or during Isaiah's interrogation of Hezekiah; in fact, it is noticeable that this question seems to be deliberately unanswered by Hezekiah. During the siege by the Assyrians Hezekiah asks Isaiah to pray for the remnant (19:4) and prays himself to YHWH (19:15); yet, in the present narrative no prayer or request for intercession by Hezekiah is recorded. Both the king of Assyria and the king of Babylon sent letters. The Assyrian letter contains threats and doubts about the ability of Hezekiah's God to save him; the contents of the Babylonian letters are not disclosed. Again, their contents are apparently of no import for the story, but it may be noted that they are accompanied by a gift and so may be assumed to be encouraging or honouring to Hezekiah. Hull has also drawn attention to an interesting contrast regarding the letters: "Sennacherib's messengers fall out of the narrative in favour of the letters, while Merodach-baladan's letters are replaced by his agents."¹⁶ The contrasts between Hezekiah's engagement with the Assyrians and with the Babylonians are manifest. Clearly something very different is envisaged in this final narrative compared with the siege narrative. The purpose of the present narrative will be considered below.

Hezekiah's motive in showing the Babylonians all his treasures is not stated. If his actions are thought to be the reason for the judgement oracle, then possibly he may be seen as being boastful of his economic strength.¹⁷ In 2 Sam. 24 the judgement on David for ordering a census of the people might be seen as a parallel, but again, the nature of David's sin is clear. Brueggemann

¹⁶ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 496.

¹⁷ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 262. Cf. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13-39*, pp. 410-412. Kaiser bases his interpretation on Greek myths, the notion being that a man who boasts of his own riches is bound to provoke the gods to anger. This not only begs the question as to Hezekiah's motive, but bases theological interpretation on a mythology alien to the Old Testament.

considers Hezekiah's action as foolish from a pragmatic point of view, but admits that there is no *explicit* theological judgement. However, he considers that Hezekiah must be "excessively proud, excessively dependent on his resources, and is indeed boasting of his wealth and effectiveness ..."¹⁸ But Brueggemann is willing to come to an implicit theological verdict: Hezekiah has turned away from YHWH to more familiar forms of security. However, the text does not make such a verdict or give the reader insight into the mind of Hezekiah at this time. Clements asserts, "...there was nothing to suggest that Hezekiah was guilty of any misplaced pride in his possession of (the treasures)".¹⁹ Seitz goes further in positively assessing the action of Hezekiah by reading the narrative alongside the Chronicler's account in 2 Chron. 32:27-31. Verse 31 summarizes the visit of the Babylonians and includes the motif of a test for Hezekiah. Interestingly, this follows the larger unit (vv. 27-30) which refers to Hezekiah's treasures, storehouses and building works, including cities. The Chronicler sees Hezekiah's prosperity as evidence of God's blessing. Thus, Seitz concludes, "The Chronicler may well be suggesting that precisely by showing the Babylonian envoys his great wealth, and all that was in his realm, he passed the test for which God had left him to himself."²⁰ However, it should be noted that the text does not expressly state that Hezekiah's display was pleasing to YHWH. Probably it is best to view Hezekiah's action simply as an act of politeness, or of openness, to show his gratitude to the emissaries; there is nothing in the text in 2 Kings that contradicts this suggestion. If it is held that Hezekiah's display has resulted in judgement, he seems to be blissfully unaware of the situation. In Solomon's day there seems to be no disparagement attached to Solomon showing the queen of Sheba his house and domestic arrangements.

The use of the verb **רָאָה** "to see" or in its hiphil stem, "to show", is clearly a key word, as it appears five times within the narrative. The showing of his treasures may seem to be an indication by Hezekiah that he would make a

¹⁸ Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 311.

¹⁹ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 295.

²⁰ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 264.

powerful ally for the Babylonians²¹ or it may be symbolic of his acceptance of such an alliance with Merodach-baladan, which the latter desired in the face of possible attack from Assyria.²² Ackroyd suggests that seeing should be recognized as something more than mere observation. He argues that there are two possible lines of interpretation. First, one may consider a general understanding of the way in which "seeing" is used in the Old Testament. Thus "To see objects, whether in prophetic vision or actuality, may involve a particular kind of relationship to them and their meaning. To 'see the land', as in Deuteronomy 34:1-4 may involve a confidence of possession, a foretaste of occupation."²³ A second line of approach is to follow the proposal of Daube.²⁴ In a situation where a house or a piece of land is being bought and sold, Roman law provided a procedure whereby the house or land was formally viewed and this was the moment of exchange. Daube relates this to certain biblical passages such as Deut. 34:1-4, where Moses is allowed to view the land of Canaan before he dies. Ackroyd then applies this understanding to the viewing of Hezekiah's treasures. He admits that there is no mention of the owner's intention to sell, but he asserts, "It is in fact God who has decreed the handing over of the land - it is his after all - and Hezekiah has become his unwitting agent in bringing about the loss of the land."²⁵ Thus, Ackroyd understands the viewing of the treasures by the envoys as the transference of Judah to the Babylonians, an anticipation of the exile. There are, at least, three problems involved in following this line of interpretation. To invoke Roman law in the interpretation of an Old Testament narrative seems somewhat risky and anachronistic. Secondly, YHWH's showing of the land already promised by him to his prophet is not a close parallel to a human king showing his treasures to a foreign envoy. Moreover, there remains the problem that neither the promise and conquest of Canaan, nor the displaying of Hezekiah's treasures and their pillaging by Babylon, are the same as a sale.

²¹ See, for example, Motyer, *Isaiah*, p. 294; Fricke, *Königen*, pp. 292-293; Wildberger, *Jesaja* 28-39, pp. 1476-1476.

²² See Gerbrandt, n. 3 above, Long, *2 Kings*, p. 243 (and references given there) on the possibility of diplomatic overtures from Babylon. Josephus (*Antiquities*, x. 30), speaks of Merodach-baladan sending envoys to invite Hezekiah to be his ally.

²³ Ackroyd, "Interpretation", p. 161.

²⁴ David Daube, *Studies in Biblical Law* (Cambridge: CUP, 1947), pp. 24ff.

²⁵ Ackroyd, "Interpretation", p. 162.

Hull asserts that there is an implication that by showing everything to the Babylonians Hezekiah “has overstepped his privileges”²⁶. He bases this conclusion on the use of the hiphil of הָרָא in Deuteronomy-Kings. Referring to the showing of the land to Moses on Mount Nebo by YHWH (Deut. 34:1, 4 and Josh. 5:6). Hull argues, “...it is YHWH who may show the land and its wealth because the land belongs to YHWH and not to the king.”²⁷ He further asserts that “...in no case does a king show anything - until Hezekiah.”²⁸ However, in 1 Kgs. 10:4 it is stated that the queen of Sheba saw Solomon’s house as well as his wisdom and various domestic arrangements. Although the root הָרָא is used in the qal rather than the hiphil in 1 Kgs. 10:4, the implication is that these were shown to her by Solomon. The act of showing his treasures in itself can hardly be regarded as an “illicit act”²⁹ on Hezekiah’s part. Furthermore, on the question of ownership, it is open to debate whether ownership of the land extends to the contents of the treasure house, the armoury and the storehouses. Hull fails to take into account the words of the oracle spoken by Isaiah. The prophet refers to the contents of Hezekiah’s house as “That which your fathers have stored up till this day” (20:17).

Hezekiah’s action - a prophetic symbol?

Explanations of the judgement in terms of Hezekiah being too boastful of his riches, or of the showing of property to foreign envoys as tantamount to handing it over, are not fully convincing, as Childs has averred in his new commentary on the book of Isaiah.³⁰ Childs states, “The very fact that the narrator of the chapter is unwilling to proceed in these directions should check the need for supplying reason. The writer’s emphasis falls on establishing a link from one event to another. The judgment that was shortly to occur was not by accident or even directly evoked by the king’s misdeed, but unfolded according to a divine plan.”³¹ Childs’ comments are judicious,

²⁶ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 518.

²⁷ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 519.

²⁸ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 519.

²⁹ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 519.

³⁰ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 287.

³¹ Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, p. 287.

though whether Hezekiah's action should be called a misdeed, is open to question. Childs does not reflect further on this linking of events. Although the verb **רָאָה** appears as a *leitwort* in the narrative, the explanation of the passage does not seem to lie in its meaning *per se*. Moreover, surveying the use of the hiphil of **רָאָה** with a human subject does not provide any interesting parallels.³²

It is perhaps more instructive to look upon what Hezekiah did as an example of a symbolic action. It may be seen as something akin to the acts that were sometimes performed by prophets in the course of their ministry to reinforce their message.³³ The obvious objection to this suggestion is that Hezekiah was not a prophet, but there is one incident in the Old Testament where a king performs symbolic actions, albeit at the behest of a prophet. In 2 Kgs. 13:15ff. Elisha tells Joash, king of Israel, to take a bow and arrows and to draw the bow and shoot an arrow through the open window eastward. The arrow is symbolic of victory over Aram. Joash is also commanded to take some arrows and to strike the ground with them, which he does three times. Elisha, however, was angry with him because he only struck the ground three times, and said that he should have done it five or six times. The prophet's explanation was that Joash would now only strike down Aram three times, whereas, if he had struck the ground five or six times, he would have made an end of Aram. Apparently, Joash's action was looked upon by Elisha as less than enthusiastic, but one cannot help wondering how Joash was expected to know how many times he should strike the ground with the arrows. However, the important point, which can be gleaned from this narrative, is that the king performed an action that was used in a symbolic way to illustrate

³² In the Deuteronomistic History, there are only four references. A man shows spies from the house of Joseph the way into the city of Bethel (Judg. 1:24-25). Jael shows Barak the dead body of Sisera (Judg. 4:22). Elisha is shown the place where an axe head fell into the Jordan (2 Kgs 6:6). Finally, Jehoida shows the captains of the Carites and the guards the hidden Joash (2 Kgs 11:4). There are two references in Esther ch. 1; King Ahasuerus displays his riches for 180 days to his governors, nobles, princes and army chiefs (Est. 1:4). He also desires to show off his wife, Queen Vashti, but she is not agreeable to the idea (Est. 1:10-12). These incidents provide the setting for the book of Esther, but it is doubtful whether they can illuminate any further our understanding of the hiphil of **רָאָה**.

³³ See, for example, the making of horns of iron by Zedekiah (1 Kgs 22:11), the purchasing, wearing and hiding of a waistcloth by Jeremiah (Jer. 13:1-7), the purchasing and breaking of an earthen flask by Jeremiah (Jer. 19:1, 10-11), and the building of siege works against a brick by Ezekiel (Ezek. 4:1-3).

the message of the prophet. Like Joash, it seems that Hezekiah is unaware of the future effects of his action. The question of whether this was fair for Joash or Hezekiah does not seem to be considered, and is probably not a concern of the writer. Nelson comments on the shooting of the arrow, "This is not just a 'visual aid' for the prophetic message, but combines with a word of power (2 Kgs. 13:17b) to set the future in motion."³⁴ Admittedly, Hezekiah performed his action without any instruction from Isaiah, but it seems that the reader may be intended to see the action as something akin to a prophetic action. It was not undertaken by a prophet, or at the behest of a prophet, but Isaiah uses it to introduce his message of forthcoming exile. It may be that the writer is using the display of the treasures by Hezekiah as a convenient means by which Isaiah can introduce the downfall of Judah, and the reader is meant to understand the viewing of the treasures by the Babylonians as a symbolic anticipation of the future, or even an initiation of it.

From the above considerations, it may be concluded that the narrator is not necessarily reflecting on the character of Hezekiah in 20:12-13. The forthcoming judgement is not directly connected with him, but the narrator is showing the reader that judgement must still come. The actions of Hezekiah in showing his visitors all his treasure and the contents of his house and storehouses are not right or wrong. They are recorded as a type or a parable of what will transpire and are used by the narrator to furnish a stage on which Isaiah may pronounce the oracle from YHWH.

Isaiah's interrogation of Hezekiah (20:14-15)

Again, Isaiah comes voluntarily to Hezekiah as in 20:1. Isaiah is mentioned with his title of "the prophet" (נָבִיא) and Hezekiah is referred to formally as King Hezekiah. Their roles are clearly defined here. Isaiah continues to be the channel of communication between YHWH and Hezekiah, and, as is about to be seen, is the mouthpiece for YHWH's oracles. Hezekiah is mentioned with the title "King", perhaps as a reminder to the reader of his

³⁴ Nelson, *Kings*, p. 218.

position and responsibilities. Possibly, it indicates the seriousness of the situation. Isaiah comes with a batch of questions, which might appear to be to gain information, but clearly have a purpose within the narrative to prepare the way for the announcement of the oracle.

The first question asked by Isaiah receives no answer. Isaiah has asked, "What did these men say?" He continues immediately with a second question, which Hezekiah answers, but the first seems to be forgotten. It is noteworthy that the narrator has not chosen to record the words of the Babylonian messengers in the opening scene of this section. We are not told what the Babylonians said, either in the course of the narrative or in answer to Isaiah's question in direct speech. There are several possible reasons for this. Hezekiah may be being evasive,³⁵ and so answers the second question, hoping that Isaiah will not pursue his first question. This may have been because the Babylonians had come to make a rebellious alliance with the king against Assyria,³⁶ possibly asking for Hezekiah's help to unseat Assyria in the east, or promising support to Hezekiah, if he is willing to be Babylon's vassal.³⁷ However, it may be that what was said is of little import for the interpretation of the narrative. The emphasis in the passage is clearly on what was seen (רָאוּ) by the Babylonians, rather than what was said by them. The narrator has already stated that Hezekiah showed his visitors all the contents of his treasure house and storehouses, and has emphasized the point again by stating at the end of v. 13: "there was nothing in his house or in all his realm that Hezekiah did not show them." Isaiah's third question is regarding what the messengers have seen. Again, the point is made twice in Hezekiah's reply that they have seen everything (v.15).³⁸ The word order of the Hebrew כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵיתִי רָאוּ, where the verb follows the direct object, further strengthens this emphasis.

This narrative contrasts with the longer narrative in chs. 18-19 where a war of words is conducted between the Rabshakeh and Hezekiah. The Rabshakeh

³⁵ Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 144.

³⁶ See n. 21 above.

³⁷ Cohn, *2 Kings*, p. 144. Cf. n. 22 above.

³⁸ Ackroyd, "An Interpretation", pp. 156-7.

and his colleagues, supported by a large army, come with a message from Sennacherib, king of Assyria. Threats, invective and propaganda pour forth from the Rabshakeh's mouth, but not a word spoken by the Babylonians is recorded. The difference between the two may lie in their different intentions; the Assyrians come to conquer, the Babylonians come ostensibly to honour Hezekiah. On the other hand, perhaps there is the suggestion from the narrator that whereas Assyria is openly aggressive towards Judah, the Babylonian embassy is to be seen as furtive and guileful. The patent reason for the visit was Hezekiah's sickness. However, the indisposition of the king may have been seen by Babylon as an opportunity to take advantage of him.

The second question from Isaiah regarding the embassy's origins is answered directly by Hezekiah. Whilst the first question of Isaiah remains unanswered, the second is answered in a superfluous fashion: "from a distant country (מֵאַרְץ רְחוֹקָה) they have come, from Babylon"³⁹ (20:14; literal translation). Babylon was mentioned in v. 12 and is now repeated with the further designation that it is "a distant country". This underlining of the place not just by repetition, but also by the addition of a defining phrase adds to its significance according to Ackroyd.⁴⁰ The Hebrew emphasizes the phrase "from a distant country" by placing it first. Various interpretations of this apparently otiose phrase have been summarized by Begg.⁴¹ It may be intended to portray Hezekiah as being self-satisfied; he is supposedly flattered by the Babylonians efforts to come so far, suggesting that he is of some importance.⁴² Secondly, it may be Hezekiah's way of deflecting Isaiah's probing, suggesting that there is nothing to be concerned about; Isaiah should concentrate on more important matters than an embassy from such a remote place. On the other hand, it has been held that this is a way of justifying his display to his visitors; it would be only proper to show them so much since they had travelled so far. Ackroyd connects the phrase with prophetic uses, so he suggests that Hezekiah is given these words to indicate ironically the

³⁹ Many manuscripts and the versions have אֲשֶׁר in addition, as does Isa. 39:3. See BHS ad loc.

⁴⁰ Ackroyd, "An Interpretation", p. 157.

⁴¹ Christopher T. Begg, "The Deuteronomistic Retouching of the Portrait of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs 20, 12-19", *BN* 38/39 (1987), pp. 7-13.

⁴² See Begg, "Retouching", p. 7 for references.

land of the future exile. Begg, however, following Ehrlich,⁴³ looks at the phrase in the context of the Deuteronomistic History, in particular Deut. 20:10-18. A distinction is made in these verses between near and distant locations. It is permissible to offer terms of peace to a city, and if peace is accepted by the inhabitants, they are to serve as forced labour. If they make war, then the city may be besieged and the males put to the sword, but the women and children and all the spoil are to be taken as booty. This applies only to the distant cities as stated in Deut. 20:15: "Thus you shall do to all the cities which are very far from you (הָרְחֵקָת מִמֶּךָּ מְאֹד), which are not cities of the nations here." The nearby cities, on the other hand, are to be placed under the ban (חֶרֶם).⁴⁴ As Begg states, "Against this background, Hezekiah's statement about the envoys' coming to him from 'a far country' would surely insinuate to the reader of Dtr that, in treating with them as he did, Hezekiah was only acting in accordance with the Deuteronomic ordinance. And in so doing, the reader might further conclude, the king hardly deserved the severe penalty announced by Isaiah in 20, 17-18."⁴⁵ Begg continues by discussing another text, Josh. 9:3-27, where the Gibeonites try to deceive the Israelites into thinking that they have come from a remote country (מֵאֶרֶץ רְחוֹקָה) (Josh. 9:6), or even from a very far country (מֵאֶרֶץ רְחוֹקָה מְאֹד) (Josh. 9:9). The Israelites at first fall for the deception and make a treaty with them. Even when the ruse is revealed, YHWH does not condemn the Israelites for their lack of discernment or impetuosity. Begg argues that the "echo" of the Gibeonites' claim of Josh. 9 may be heard in Hezekiah's words in 2 Kgs. 20:14b. Furthermore, he reckons that Hezekiah would not be considered any more culpable than the Israelites under Joshua, when he acted towards the Babylonians in the spirit of Deut. 20:10-15.⁴⁶

Begg also discusses the narrative regarding the visit of the queen of Sheba, which does not use the same terminology as that found in the display of

⁴³ A.B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel IV* (Leipzig, Georg Olms, 1912), p. 141.

⁴⁴ Hull's (*Hezekiah*, pp. 515-516) assertion that the regulations of Deut. 13:2-12 supersede the near/far distinction hardly seems relevant, as Deut. 13 is concerned with someone who tries to deceive the Israelites into worshipping foreign gods. This hardly fits Hezekiah's situation.

⁴⁵ Begg, "Retouching", p. 9. The latter sentence seems to assume that Isaiah's pronouncements are because of Hezekiah's actions, but as noted above, this seems unlikely.

Hezekiah, but the queen is clearly portrayed as coming from a distant land and so, Solomon may rightly deal with her in a peaceable way. Again, no announcement of judgement ensues. Begg asks, "... where is the equity in Yahweh's responding so differently to the very similar actions of the two kings?"⁴⁷ Begg is brought to this quandary because he apparently assumes that the judgement is reckoned a result of Hezekiah's actions. His solution from a source-critical perspective is to see 20:14b as "...a Deuteronomistic insertion within the pre-existing narrative of 2 Kgs 20, 12-19."⁴⁸ He views the intention behind the insertion as an attempt to mitigate what he considers the negative impression given by the original narrative. However, if the narrative is read as a final form, the use of the phrase *מֵאֶרֶץ רְחוֹקָה*, strengthens the argument that Hezekiah's actions are permissible and indeed a matter of courtesy. It is not stated that the judgement to come after Hezekiah's time is directly attributable to Hezekiah's actions concerning the Babylonian embassy. The phrase, *מֵאֶרֶץ רְחוֹקָה*, makes this point more sharply.

Seitz, commenting on the narrative in the Isaian context, draws attention to Isaiah chs. 13-14, where it is shown that Babylon will replace Assyria in later days as part of a larger divine plan for the earth (Isa. 14:26). Seitz comments, "In chapter 13 a nation is summoned 'from a distant land' (*mē'ereš merḥāq*). Is the narrative trying to say here that the larger purpose of God is unfolding now, even during the reign of King Hezekiah, through this mysterious visit of Babylonian envoys? If so, the emphasis need not be on the disobedient actions of Hezekiah - which would represent an obvious departure from his portrayal elsewhere - but solely on the divine purpose mysteriously unfolding."⁴⁹

The two elements of the narrative, which are emphasized in particular through the interrogation of Hezekiah by Isaiah, are those of totality and the distant land. Ackroyd has rightly stated that these two emphases are

⁴⁶ Begg, "Retouching", pp. 9-10.

⁴⁷ Begg, "Retouching", p. 10.

⁴⁸ Begg, "Retouching", p.10.

⁴⁹ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 265-266.

significant and the two are brought together and used as the basis of the oracle brought by Isaiah warning of judgment to come: "Behold, the days are coming, when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up till this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left, says the LORD (v.17)."⁵⁰

Absence of intercession

Prayer is conspicuous by its absence on Hezekiah's part in this section. He neither prays himself, nor asks Isaiah to pray for him or his descendants despite the word which has come against them. The fact that Hezekiah does not pray here is seen by some as evidence of a selfish motive. Since the judgement is for a later time than Hezekiah's, he is assumed to be guilty of self-interest by not interceding.⁵¹ As noted by Begg, in several places in the Deuteronomistic History people pray for themselves, or seek someone else to pray for them.⁵² Hezekiah did not simply resign himself to the situation in the previous narratives already discussed. Whether it was the city that was threatened or his own life, he petitioned God earnestly. Goldingay, in his discussion of the logic of intercession, reflects upon the meaning of Ezek. 22:30: "And I sought for a man among them who should build up the wall and stand in the breach before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found none." He states, "A remark of God's to Ezekiel makes the point very sharply that human beings fulfil their prophetic/priestly intercessory vocation when they query whether God's intentions should be implemented."⁵³ Yet in this pericope, Hezekiah is depicted as accepting the oracle without questioning it, or seeking its reversal, or the reduction of its effects. It might also be mentioned that no example of petition or intercession is found in 2 Kings 21-25 representing the final one hundred years of the existence of the state of Judah before the exile. The reason for the absence of petition and/or intercession may indicate that Judah's fate is sealed and that no such intervention will reverse this decision. As Jeremiah is commanded not to intercede for his people, there may be here a subconscious allusion that

⁵⁰ Ackroyd, "An Interpretation", p. 157.

⁵¹ See, for example, Robert H. O'Connell, *Concentricity and Continuity: The Literary Structure of Isaiah* (JSOTSup, 188; Sheffield: SAP, 1994), p. 126.

⁵² Begg, "Element", p. 36.

⁵³ John Goldingay, "The Logic of intercession", *Theology* 101 (1998), pp. 262-270 (265).

any prayer for Hezekiah's descendants will be rejected.⁵⁴ This again suggests that Hezekiah is being portrayed in a positive light; he has the courage to challenge God's intentions when he believes that he has good grounds for doing so, as in the previous narrative, but he is willing to accept the decision of YHWH when it is clear that there is no possibility of changing the divine will.⁵⁵ Thus, Hezekiah may be seen to be depicted as a man of faith and discernment.

The Oracle (20:16-18)

Hezekiah is now commanded to hear (שָׁמַע) the word of YHWH. He must now heed God's word as he previously paid attention to the Babylonian visitors. The action moves from seeing (רָאָה) back to hearing. There is a sense in which the oracle forebodes disaster on both previous generations and generations yet to come. Hezekiah's ancestors are dead, but what they have left behind, the treasures, which they have stored up, will be carried away. Some of his sons or descendants will also be taken to Babylon and will become eunuchs (סְרִיסִים).⁵⁶ It seems that only Hezekiah is not directly affected by the judgement that is to fall. Later, in v. 19, Hezekiah can see that YHWH's word is good, for at least there is peace in his time, even though his ancestors and progeny are affected. The disaster, which is implied, is understood by Clements not to be that of the destruction of Jerusalem and exile as experienced in 587, but of the deportation of Jehoiachin in 598/597.⁵⁷ On this basis, Clements argues that the narrative must have been written between Jehoiachin's deportation and before 587. It is true that the language of the present oracle allows for the continuation of the dynasty, if in fact only some sons are taken. Furthermore, the loss of the contents of the treasure house and storehouses is nothing new, if the accounts of the books of Kings

⁵⁴ Cf. Christopher R. Seitz, *Word without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 199-200.

⁵⁵ The famous prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr (*Justice and Mercy* [New York: Harper & Row, 1974], p. iii) comes to mind: "God give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other."

⁵⁶ The word may simply mean an official serving a king, but it is obviously a symbol of powerlessness. Long (*2 Kings*, p. 246) suggests that ironically, they might be sent out as envoys in the same way as the Babylonians who have come to Hezekiah at the beginning of this narrative.

⁵⁷ Clements, *Deliverance of Jerusalem*, pp. 63-71.

are to be believed.⁵⁸ However, it is debatable whether the events prophesied can be pinpointed so accurately. It may be that as the narrative now stands in its final form, the reader is probably meant to note that hard times lie ahead without these being fully revealed at this stage. As Nelson puts it, "The narrator refuses to let the cat out of the bag prematurely."⁵⁹

The word "Behold" (הִנֵּה) (v. 17) draws the reader's attention to something of importance and may indicate a change in point of view. Isaiah as a prophet speaks forth the word of YHWH; "behold" is a signal of attention, information and observation. He discerns what Hezekiah cannot. The word "see" (רָאָה) is not used as might have been expected, but rather the verb "to come" (בָּא). Just as the envoys had come (בָּאוּ) from a remote place (v. 14), so the days are coming (בָּאִים) when everything in Hezekiah's house will be carried off to Babylon. The Babylonians' coming is symbolic of the days yet to come.

Hezekiah's Response (20:19)

The interpretation of v.19 is pivotal to the understanding of the characterization of Hezekiah in this narrative. Two basic alternative readings have been proposed. The words of Hezekiah may be a cynical response to the prophetic oracle. The king is being selfish, thankful that the problems with the Babylonians will come after his reign.⁶⁰ He can understand the word of YHWH as good, because such troubles will not affect him, only his descendants. The alternative is to view Hezekiah as a pious king who willingly accepts the oracle, grateful to God for at least delaying any judgement.

The text as it stands has attracted the attention of the source critics, several of whom have argued that part of v. 19 must be a gloss, and indeed, it may appear curious that the word וַיֵּאמֶר is found twice so close together without

⁵⁸ Cf. 1 Kgs 14:25-28; 15:17-19; 2 Kgs 12:18-19; 14:11-14; 16:7-9; and (in Hezekiah's reign) 18:13-16.

⁵⁹ Nelson, *Kings*, p. 246.

⁶⁰ Cogan and Tadmor (*II Kings*, p. 262) see the king in this light, because they believe the narrative has been edited by a "late Deuteronomist" perhaps in the early period of Babylonian domination over Judah. The depiction of a pious Hezekiah has been changed in the light of subsequent events.

the intervention of a new subject. Most commonly it is felt that v. 19b is the gloss, as it appears to be explaining why Hezekiah should consider the word good.⁶¹ On the other hand, Begg views v. 19a as “Deuteronomistic retouching”, as the first part of the verse, “Then said Hezekiah to Isaiah, ‘The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good’”, seems to him to be inserted to counteract the negative image of Hezekiah given by v. 19b. This, of course depends on whether the image in v. 19b is indeed viewed as being negative. As will be seen below, this is not necessarily the case.

Furthermore, it does not follow from the repetition of **וַיֹּאמֶר** that one or other half of the verse has been inserted later. The repetition of this word (or its feminine equivalent) is occasionally found on the lips of the same character without any intervening speech from another character. This phenomenon is found several times in the Hebrew Bible.⁶² If an insertion has been made, one wonders why the word was repeated. What might be considered clumsy editing by a source critic may well be a literary device that is intended to indicate something of importance. The repetition of **וַיֹּאמֶר** suggests that there is a break in the speech of the character, which is not interrupted, by the speech of the other character. There might be several reasons for such a break. Possibly Hezekiah is waiting for some response to his words from Isaiah. When none is forthcoming, Hezekiah continues with what he is saying. However, it is noteworthy that the first part of what Hezekiah says is clearly stated to be directed towards Isaiah. The second part gives no such indication. It could still be directed towards Isaiah, if it were felt unnecessary to repeat the phrase, or it could suggest that this is a general statement, which

⁶¹ See Begg, “Retouching”, p. 11 n. 13 for references.

⁶² See, for example, Gen. 15:2-3, 5; 22:7; Ex. 3:5-6; Judges 11:36-37; 2 Sam. 15:3-4; 1 Kgs. 2:42-44. Cf. 2 Sam. 11:7-8 where two different verbs (**וַיֹּאמֶר** and **וַיִּשָּׁאֵל**) are used, but both refer to the words of David with no intervention from another character. See Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, pp. 43-45 for a helpful discussion of the phenomenon and the above passages. Further examples are adduced by Moberly (*Old Testament*, p. 18 n. 19), who discusses in particular Ex. 3:14-15. See also Cynthia L. Miller (*The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative* [HSM, 55; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996], pp. 294-295), who discusses Gen. 38:11, and 1 Sam. 18:17. Attempts at categorizing the occurrences of this phenomenon have been made by Samuel A. Meier (*Speaking of Speaking: Marking Direct Discourse in the Hebrew Bible* [VTSup, 46; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992]) and E.J. Revell (“The Repetition of Introductions to Speech as a Feature of Biblical Hebrew”, *VT* 47 [1997], pp. 91-110). The notion that the word **וַיֹּאמֶר** is added because the writer wants to keep to a pattern of seven references in the unit, as Hull (*Hezekiah*, p. 499, n. 21) suggests, is eccentric, and completely

indicates Hezekiah's feelings.⁶³ It is difficult to be certain as to whether Hezekiah's words in v. 19b are spoken or are a record of his thoughts. The latter may be more likely in view of the lack of an indirect object. It is not unusual for the inner thoughts of a person to be revealed by the narrator in direct speech in the Old Testament. As Alter notes, "The biblical preference for direct discourse is so pronounced that thought is almost invariably rendered as actual speech, that is, quoted monologue."⁶⁴ A parallel might be drawn between 20:19 and 2 Sam. 15:3-4, where Absalom is attempting to gain favour with his countrymen with an eye to the throne: "Absalom would say to him, 'See, your claims are good (טוֹבִים) and right; but there is no man deputed by the king to hear you.' Absalom said moreover, 'Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a suit or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.'" Absalom makes a specific comment to a petitioner, whose claims he declares to be good and right; he then follows this with a statement indicating his wish that he were a judge that he might give justice to everyone who needed it.

Despite the forthcoming desolation, which is projected for his descendants, Hezekiah still views the word as good (טוֹב). His respect for the word of YHWH through the prophet corresponds with his obedience to the commandments of YHWH given through Moses (2 Kgs. 18:6). This suggests that Hezekiah's words portray him as an example of piety,⁶⁵ but it should be noted that the words on their own may not indicate the proper response to a word of judgement. There is some debate as to whether the similar words of Eli in 1 Sam. 3:18 constitute such a response.⁶⁶ Hezekiah follows his first statement with a general declaration that his days will be peaceful and secure. The latter might be interpreted as an attempt by Hezekiah to convince himself

misses the significance of the recording of the term, and undermines the skill of the writer.

⁶³ It is not always easy to know in Hebrew whether the subject of אָמַר is speaking or thinking, if there is no indirect object mentioned. See Sternberg, *Poetics*, p. 97.

⁶⁴ Alter, *Narrative*, pp. 67-68. Alter continues by discussing the reason for this phenomenon and concludes that the biblical writers did not sharply distinguish between thought and speech.

⁶⁵ Goswell, *Kingship*, ch. 6; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 455-456; Ackroyd, "An Interpretation", p. 335; Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, p. 66.

⁶⁶ See R.W.L. Moberly, "To Hear the Master's Voice: Revelation and Spiritual Discernment in the Call of Samuel", *SJT* 48 (1995), pp. 443-468 (463). Cf. Lyle Eslinger, *Kingship of God in Crisis: A Close Reading of 1 Samuel 1-12* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985), pp. 154-

that the oracle is acceptable, as is often the case when the inner thoughts of a character are being revealed by the narrator,⁶⁷ or these words may be taken as an inward response that indicates Hezekiah's faith in YHWH, for YHWH's words promise peace, at least in his lifetime.

However, many translations of Hezekiah's words do give support to the reading that suggests that Hezekiah is a selfish and thoughtless individual, who is pleased in a self-satisfied kind of way to have peace in his own time despite what might happen to his sons. The RSV and NRSV, for example, both translate, "For he thought, 'Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?'" This nuance is perhaps even more pronounced in the NJB, where the full verse reads: "Hezekiah said to Isaiah, 'This word of Yahweh that you announce is reassuring,' for he was thinking, 'And why not? So long as there is peace and security during my lifetime.'" The MT of the parallel verse in Isa. 39:8 is a little different, and perhaps not quite as open to this construing of the text.⁶⁸ As Ackroyd notes, it would be understandable that someone would be relieved to know that a disaster was coming at a later date and not in their own time, "But", as he continues, "in the context of a significant conversation, such smugness seems totally out of place."⁶⁹

Hull has asserted that the initial response of Hezekiah to the word of disaster is strange, "...unless it be read as a general statement that any דְּבַר־יְהוָה is good. The only way to read the response of this specific YHWH word as good news in the surface text is to read the second statement as cynical: the news is good since it does not affect my own time when peace will continue."⁷⁰ However, it is fallacious to suppose that these are the only possible alternatives. There seems to be no good reason why Hezekiah's

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⁶⁷ Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, p. 63.

⁶⁸ Isa. 39:8 has כִּי where 2 Kgs. 20:19 has הֲלֹא אִם. Sweeney (*Isaiah 1-39*, p. 510) believes that this makes little difference to the essential meaning of the statement which follows, but in compositional terms he suggests that this is evidence of the priority of Kings and that the Isaiah version idealizes the character of Hezekiah. It is interesting that Goswell (*Kingship*, ch. 6) asserts, "There is nothing in (Isa. 39) v. 8b ... that necessarily places a question mark against Hezekiah's piety."

⁶⁹ Ackroyd, "An Interpretation", p. 158. See also Nelson (*Kings*, p. 246), who feels that such smugness would be out of character for the virtuous Hezekiah as depicted by the narrator.

⁷⁰ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 528.

words cannot be understood as a response of submission, as, for example, Nelson understands them.⁷¹ It is not unreasonable to suppose that Hezekiah views the particular content of this oracle to be good in the sense of “just” or “fair”, recognizing that the threat of judgement has been hanging over the kingdom of Judah for some time.⁷² There may be a sense of relief that at least it has been delayed during Hezekiah’s lifetime, so Hezekiah speaks of peace (שָׁלוֹם) and security (אַמָּת) in his days. Deliverance has been granted from the Assyrians, but there is no certainty that history will be repeated in respect to the Babylonians. The mercy of God cannot be presumed upon. Hezekiah’s remarks need not be sarcastic comments, but sentiments of relief with perhaps the hope that what has been delayed for a time may be delayed even longer, if Hezekiah conceives of YHWH as a God who is slow to anger.

Hull supports his view that the surface meaning of Hezekiah’s words represents a cynical response by arguing against taking the three key terms, טוב, שָׁלוֹם and אַמָּת in 20:19 at their face value as meaning “good”, “peace” and “security”.⁷³ His concern is to ascertain what the “subsurface levels of the text”⁷⁴ indicate, and he concludes that the uses of all three words in 1 and 2 Kings point to irony in their use. In his discussion of אַמָּת he refers to the queen of Sheba’s comment in 1 Kgs. 10:6 that “The report was true (אַמָּת) which I heard in my own land of your affairs and of your wisdom.” Again, Hull queries whether there is a subsurface meaning to the queen’s statement, “Given other images within the Solomon narrative... For one thing, Solomon’s wealth has a positive meaning in 1 Kings 10 only at the surface level as a depiction of his success. The subsurface meaning is that he is

⁷¹ Nelson, *Kings*, p. 246. Cf. Ehrlich, *Randglossen*, p. 142.

⁷² See 2 Kgs 17:19-20. These are the words of the narrator, and, therefore, it must be admitted that it is not certain that Hezekiah is shown as being aware of the judgement that threatens the state of Judah. However, the demise of the northern kingdom might be considered sufficient evidence for Hezekiah to realize that Judah is also in a parlous situation vis-à-vis the judgement of God. There is no parallel to 2 Kgs 17:19-20 in the book of Isaiah. Thus, it is not clear in that context that this is the reason why Hezekiah assesses the words of Isaiah to be good. Beuken (*Isaiah II*, p. 412) looks to the future for a resolution. He suggests that the fairness of God’s actions must concern their actual outcome, but since “... we are not told how the exile can be seen as something good, Hezekiah’s remark thus provides the narrative with an open end.”

⁷³ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 529.

⁷⁴ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 538.

multiplying wealth for himself.”⁷⁵ So Hull’s argument is that the subsurface meaning of **אֱמֶת** in 2 Kgs. 20:19 depends on the subsurface meaning of the word in 1 Kgs. 10:6, which depends on the subsurface meaning of Solomon’s wealth. One is tempted to wonder whether such multi-layers of meanings can lead to any solid conclusion. He further mentions the use of **אֱמֶת** in 1 Kgs. 17:24, where the widow of Zarephath’s son is revived by Elijah. The woman tells Elijah: “Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the LORD in your mouth is truth (**אֱמֶת**).” Hull does not make any direct comment on the use of the word in this instance; only he points out that the queen of Sheba and the widow are both foreigners from opposite ends of the spectrum as regards wealth and geographic location, but there seems to be no reason not to understand **אֱמֶת** in a positive way in this context.

The third use of **אֱמֶת**, which Hull discusses, is found in the Micaiah narrative in 1 Kgs. 22:16. It is interesting to note that the other two key terms of v. 19 are also found in the story of Micaiah (**טוֹב** and **שָׁלוֹם**). Hull argues that “The entire Micaiah-Ahab narrative turns upside down the notions of good and evil, true and false, peace and lack of peace.”⁷⁶ This statement fails to discern the subtleties of this narrative.⁷⁷ The context must be carefully considered. When Ahab adjures Micaiah to speak only the truth (2 Kgs. 22:16), it is after Micaiah has prophesied that the king should go up against Ramoth-gilead, because YHWH will give it into the king’s hand. It is clear from reading the entire passage that Ahab knows that this is not a word from YHWH; it is also clear that Ahab knows that the 400 prophets say whatever he wants to hear. Micaiah repeats the words of the other prophets verbatim (v. 12b), possibly in a sarcastic tone of voice that makes it very clear what Micaiah is about. Thus Moberly comments: “This provokes from the king a protestation of delicious irony. The man who hitherto has wanted nothing but confirmation of his own will now claims the moral high ground and says that he wants nothing less than the truth of God, and implies that Micaiah is the one who has problems

⁷⁵ Hull, *Hezekiah*, pp. 529-530.

⁷⁶ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 530.

⁷⁷ The comments which follow on the Micaiah narrative are heavily reliant on an unpublished paper by R.W.L. Moberly, *Should Christians Believe in the God of the Old Testament?: The Story of Micaiah ben Imlah as a Test Case*.

with being truthful.”⁷⁸ Micaiah has thus succeeded in provoking Ahab to ask for the truth. The notion of truth is thus, not turned upside-down, as Hull asserts, but is being used in a context where it is clear when truth is being used in an ironic way for a specific purpose. It is apparent from a close reading of the story that YHWH is not deliberately deceiving Ahab, but confronting him with the reality of his situation, probably to proffer to him the opportunity to repent. After his discussion of the terms אֱמֶת, שְׁלוֹם, and טוֹב, Hull concludes: “Our discovery that they were key terms in the ‘true and false prophecy’ narrative of Micaiah, where nothing is obvious about their meaning, points to the same thing in the Hezekiah statements.”⁷⁹ Enough has hopefully been said to demonstrate that it is patently not the case that the meaning of these terms has become convoluted in the Micaiah narrative, and there is no reason to suggest that the same is the case in the Hezekiah narrative under present examination.

What is important is to try to catch the tone of Hezekiah’s voice and understand the tenor of the use of the words in context. Hull is no doubt correct in asserting that the translation of אֱמֶת by the word “security” is an interpretation,⁸⁰ but this something of a truism, for all translations are in fact interpretations, as Goswell rightly notes.⁸¹ However, the meaning of this word in this context requires further investigation, for it must be admitted that this is not the translation which is commonly used for אֱמֶת in other contexts. Goswell’s comments are noteworthy. He asks the question: “Whose ‘faithfulness’ is being referred to in (Isa.) 39:8?” His conclusion is that it is a divine faithfulness that Hezekiah will enjoy. He bases this conclusion on overall biblical usage and the use of אֱמֶת in nearby references in Isa. 38:18, 19, 42:3, and 43:9.

Beuken believes that the depiction of Hezekiah as a pious king is maintained in this conclusion to the narrative. Writing about the Isaian context, he considers that the words of Hezekiah are directed “...to those for whom the

⁷⁸ Moberly, *Micaiah*.

⁷⁹ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 533.

⁸⁰ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 529.

words and deeds of the prophet are being preserved.”⁸² This could refer to either pre-exilic or post-exilic readers. “The king bears witness to his conviction that ‘peace and faithfulness’ continue to form the horizon of his existence and that the same is possible for those whose lives have been marked by the threat or indeed the fact of the exile.”⁸³ While later readers might take some comfort from Hezekiah’s words, the phrase “in my days” (בְּיָמַי), seems to obviate such a reading.

Ackroyd suggests another interpretation: “...that Hezekiah’s words are a kind of auspicious pronouncement designed to avert disaster.”⁸⁴ He compares Hezekiah’s words with those of David when waiting for news of the result of the battle against Absalom. David speaks of Ahimaaz thus: “He is a good man, and comes with good tidings (בְּשׂוּרָה טוֹבָה)” (2 Sam. 18:27). Another example which Ackroyd might have considered is the incident of Adonijah’s attempt to make himself king, which is followed by the coronation of Solomon. When Jonathan, son of Abiathar, comes with news of the anointing of Solomon, Adonijah says to Jonathan, “Come in, for you are a worthy man and bring good news (טוֹב תְּבַשֵּׂר)” (1 Kgs. 1:42). The problem with this interpretation of Hezekiah’s words is that Hezekiah has already been told the bad news, whereas David and Adonijah, while they may fear something bad is about to happen, do not know one way or the other. It is questionable whether taking Hezekiah’s words as an auspice makes sense here. His second sentence is a logical conclusion from the words of the pronouncement of Isaiah: since it is his sons who are to be affected, his lifetime should be relatively peaceful.

Yet another possibility is that Hezekiah accepts the pronouncement in a gracious way, being grateful that the disaster will not fall immediately. The second statement is an explanation of the declaration that YHWH’s word is

⁸¹ Goswell, *Kingship*, ch. 6.

⁸² Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 413.

⁸³ Beuken, *Isaiah II*, p. 413.

⁸⁴ Ackroyd, “An Interpretation”, p. 158. Gray (*I & II Kings*, p. 703) compares Hezekiah’s attitude with that of the modern Arab who will answer, “Praise be to Allah” when asked regarding his welfare, and who may add “in any condition”, if suffering adversity. According to Gray, Hezekiah was following a primitive instinct; he felt it necessary to

good.⁸⁵ Ackroyd discusses the meaning of **אִם לֹא יִהְיֶה**, which he takes to mean “Is it not the case that ...” or “Surely there will be...”⁸⁶ He then argues that, if the order of the narratives as found in the final text is ignored and Hezekiah’s words are correlated with the theme of Hezekiah as the great reformer, as found in 2 Kgs. 18:4, the obscurity of these words is removed. Alluding to Jer. 26:17-19, Ackroyd states, “Here we have a tradition of repentance and reformation which differs from that of the Isaiah material; but it provides us with an analogy on which we may base the suggestion that in this all too concise wording put into the mouth of Hezekiah there is a reminder of his loyalty and reform.”⁸⁷ He sees a similar interpretation in the way the Chronicler handles the incident. There the visit of the envoys is seen as a test in which God leaves Hezekiah “to himself in order to try him and to know all that was in his heart” (2 Chron. 32:31). Ackroyd seems to believe that Hezekiah’s positive response in 20:19 was a confirmation that he had passed the test. His response to the oracle of judgement is acceptance, not rebellion nor smugness. It is perhaps even more telling that Hezekiah passed the test in the Chronicler’s eyes, for the Chronicler is not seen to be idealising the reign of Hezekiah as perhaps the books of Kings and Isaiah may be. As Seitz notes, the Chronicler is not interested in eliminating negative details;⁸⁸ the writer plainly states that Hezekiah sinned: “But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem (2 Chron. 32:25).” This is said to have happened after his healing, but before the present incident involving the Babylonian envoys. It also states in the next verse that Hezekiah humbled himself and, therefore, the wrath of YHWH did not come upon the Jerusalemites and Hezekiah in the days of Hezekiah. If the Chronicler believed that Hezekiah was sinning by showing his treasures to the Babylonians, it is probable that he would have stated this, as he does not refrain from mentioning his sin in respect of his response to the sign of his healing. This suggests that a positive interpretation was placed upon the actions and words of Hezekiah in this incident in ancient times, at least in the

conclude with an auspicious statement.

⁸⁵ Cf. the similar kind of statement on the lips of Absalom mentioned above.

⁸⁶ Ackroyd, “An Interpretation”, p. 159.

⁸⁷ Ackroyd, “An Interpretation”, p. 159.

time of the writer of Chronicles.⁸⁹

While it is interesting to read the narrative in the light of the Chronicles narrative, and it is reassuring to find that this supports a positive interpretation of Hezekiah's response in 2 Kgs. 20:19, perhaps an attempt should be made to understand the meaning of this unit and the response of Hezekiah in particular within the context of the Hezekiah narratives in 2 Kings. As seen above, Ackroyd's suggestion is to ignore what lies between the reforms of Hezekiah (18:3) and this unit. Yet it is interesting to compare and contrast this narrative with the narrative of the siege of Jerusalem and the defeat of Sennacherib (18:13-19:37).

The verb שָׁמַע plays a significant role in both narratives. At the beginning of the present narrative Hezekiah has welcomed, given heed to, the Babylonians (שָׁמַע עַל)⁹⁰ (20:13) after they heard (שָׁמַע) about his illness (20:12). Hull has noted that the same phrase, כִּי שָׁמַע כִּי, occurs in both 20:12 and 19:8.⁹¹ In 19:8 we read that the Rabshakeh "found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah; for he heard that the king had left Lachish." In the next verse, the Assyrian king hears about (וַיִּשְׁמַע⁹² אֵל) Tirhakah, who has set out to fight against him. Compare again 20:13 where Hezekiah pays heed (וַיִּשְׁמַע עֲלֵיהֶם) to the Babylonians. Later in the narrative Isaiah commands

⁸⁸ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 263.

⁸⁹ This is also true of Ben Sirach; Hezekiah is named alongside David and Josiah as being a king who was not a great sinner (Ecclus. 49:4). He is also remembered as one who did what pleased YHWH and held to the ways of David (Ecclus. 48:22).

⁹⁰ This is one of the few text-critical problems in this section. Isa. 39:2 and the main versions read וַיִּשְׁמַח עֲלֵיהֶם. Many commentators have argued that this reading makes better sense. The Kings reading has been defended by Christopher T. Begg ("The Reading at 2 Kings XX 13" *VT* 36 [1986], pp. 339-341 [339]), who argues in its favour on the ground that Merodach-baladan's embassy was sent with the intention of forming an alliance between Babylon and Judah. He seeks to substantiate his argument by referring to two texts in Kings where שָׁמַע is also used in the sense of "hearkening", albeit with the preposition אֵל. The texts in question, 1 Kgs 15:20 and 2 Kgs 16:9 both involve a king giving heed to another king who has sent presents in the hope of forming an alliance. See Begg, "2 Kings XX 13", pp. 339-340. Whether or not Begg is correct regarding the intended alliance between Merodach-baladan and Hezekiah, the two texts in Kings suggest that the Kings reading is possibly correct. From a literary point of view, the fact that it responds to the שָׁמַע in v. 12, would further support its retention.

⁹¹ Hull, *Hezekiah*, p. 496.

⁹² However, the apparatus in BHS proposes עַל based on Isa. 37:9 and QOr. See BHS ad. loc.

Hezekiah to hear (שָׁמַע) the word of YHWH (20:16). In the siege narrative the Rabshakeh commands the Jerusalemites to hear (שָׁמַעוּ) the word of the great king, the king of Assyria (18:28), and tells them twice not to listen to Hezekiah (אַל-תִּשְׁמְעוּ) (18:31, 32). It seems fitting that near the end of the Hezekiah narratives, it is the word of YHWH that is to be heard. Hezekiah in effect places a value judgement on the word of YHWH; the word is good (טוֹב). In 18:13-19:37, there is much about hearing words and there are several value judgements passed upon the words that are spoken and heard. The Rabshakeh evaluates Hezekiah's words as meaningless words (literally "words of the lips") (18:20), unreliable (18:30), and misleading (18:32). Likewise, the Assyrian regards YHWH's words as deceptive (19:10) and the words of the people as imprudent (18:22). The words of YHWH, his servant, Hezekiah, and his people, are all despised. It is not surprising that a foreign attacker, who is not a YHWH worshipper, would take such a view. What is particularly interesting is that the Rabshakeh's disparaging comments about the words of Hezekiah, the Jerusalemites and YHWH always involve the use of the verb בָּטַח. Thus, the great king asks Hezekiah via the Rabshakeh, "Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you now rely (בָּטַחְתָּ), that you have rebelled against me?" (18:20) (Note also the use of the noun בְּטַחְיוֹן, "confidence", in the previous verse.) He continues by stating that Hezekiah is reliant (בָּטַח) on Egypt, and that Pharaoh is like a broken reed of a staff to all who rely (בָּטַח) on him (v. 21). In v. 22 the subject is plural and, although Hezekiah is being addressed, probably it is the people of Jerusalem who are in mind. The Rabshakeh seems to imply it would be imprudent for them to say that they were relying (בָּטַחְתֶּם) on YHWH, because he has misunderstood Hezekiah's motives in removing the high places. In 18:30 the Assyrian again casts aspersions on what Hezekiah might say to the people by asserting, "Do not let Hezekiah make you to rely on (בָּטַחְתֶּם) the LORD by saying, The LORD will surely deliver us..." The war of words comes to a climax when the Assyrian king sends a message to Hezekiah disparaging the words of YHWH: "Thus shall you speak to Hezekiah king of Judah: 'Do not let your God on whom you rely (בָּטַחְתָּ)

deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria.” If the value judgements of the Rabshakeh and Sennacherib in chs. 18-19 are taken at face value, it seems reasonable to accept Hezekiah’s evaluation of the words of YHWH as sincere. The Rabshakeh is disparaging about the words of YHWH and his servant, so it is not surprising that Hezekiah, a man whose trust in YHWH was stated so emphatically near the beginning of these narratives, should evaluate the word of YHWH as good. Although the word **בְּטָח** is not present, it seems clear that in contradistinction to the disparagements on trusting in YHWH from the Assyrian, Hezekiah is still being portrayed as a man who trusts in YHWH.

The second statement by Hezekiah in 20:19 may also be compared and contrasted with the speeches of the Rabshakeh. Hezekiah signifies his relief that there will be peace and security in his days. The phrase **שָׁלוֹם וְאֵמֶת** is not common in the Old Testament. Apart from the parallel verse in Isa. 39:8, it is found only in Est. 9:30 and Jer. 33:6. In Esther, the reference is to “words of peace and truth”, but Jer. 33:6 provides a closer parallel. “Behold, I will bring to it health and healing, and I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security (**שָׁלוֹם וְאֵמֶת**).” The phrase is probably a hendiadys that signifies “peaceful stability”, “sure peace”, or even “lasting peace”.⁹³ The use of the term **אֵמֶת** appears to signify something that is reliable, and “...will prove to be true in the future”.⁹⁴

Read alongside the siege narrative, Hezekiah’s words become particularly poignant. The Assyrian’s message is repeatedly that by trusting in others, especially YHWH, there will be no peace and security, unless they surrender to Sennacherib. In 18:19-24 reliance on Egypt or YHWH will not be sufficient to repulse the Assyrians. In other words, such trust will result in war and defeat. On the other hand, if they will make peace with the king of Assyria, the Rabshakeh argues, they will inherit what would be the ambition of most of the people, their own vine, fig tree and cistern in a plentiful land (18:31-32). However, of course, this would not be in their own land. The

⁹³ NAB, ad loc.

propaganda is thinly veiled; the security it promises is the forced security of submission to a foreign power and deportation to another land. In 19:10-13 the message to Hezekiah from Sennacherib is in essence that he should not trust in YHWH's promises that Jerusalem will be saved from the Assyrians, because none of the other gods have delivered their devotees from the power of the Assyrians. Although the oracle of YHWH speaks of judgement, it is delayed judgement. It is a preferable prospect compared with the immediate deportation and loss of security offered by the Assyrians. It is perfectly reasonable to view Hezekiah's statements in 20:19 as expressions of trust in God and of gratitude for the peace and security during his reign, knowing that the God who has delayed judgement once is ready, willing and able to do the same, if his people and especially their rulers will respond in a proper way towards YHWH. That this is so may be seen by considering the situation some years later in the time of King Josiah, when a similar delay and parallel royal exemption from divine judgement was predicted. Huldah the prophetess prophesies judgement on Jerusalem and its inhabitants because they have turned from YHWH to worship other gods. However, the king of Judah is spared because he was humble and penitent. Josiah is told: "You shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring on this place (2 Kgs. 22:20)."

20:20-21

The remainder of Hezekiah's reign is passed over quickly. The only notice, apart from his death, concerns his great engineering feat of providing a permanent source of water within the city walls. "Hezekiah's Tunnel" may be of historical, geographical, and sociological significance, but it does not seem to be rated highly in the theological purposes of the writers of Kings. The closing formulae usually contain four elements, whether used of the kings of Israel or Judah. These include the source of reference, the notice of death, the place of burial and the succession. Not all of them are always present as is the case with Hezekiah, where there is no mention of the place of his burial in Kings.⁹⁵ Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, is the last king of whom it

⁹⁴ Jepsen, "יְהוֹנָדָה", p. 292.

⁹⁵ Cf. 2 Chron. 32:33 where it states that "they buried him in the ascent of the tombs of the sons of David."

is said that he “was buried with his fathers in the city of David” (2 Kgs. 16:20). Later kings (Manasseh, 2Kgs. 21:18; Amon, 21:26;) were buried in the garden of their own house, which is called “the garden of Uzza”.⁹⁶ The great Josiah is said to have been buried “in his own tomb” (23:30). Scholars have speculated about the reasons for these changes in respect of the later kings of Judah. Was there an actual change in burial custom⁹⁷ or is it case of a change of redactor?⁹⁸

The clause, “Hezekiah slept with his fathers” (2 Kgs. 20:21) suggests that his death was natural, as this phrase is not used of kings who have died of an unnatural cause. What appears strange is that Hezekiah, and likewise, Josiah have comparatively short death notices, when some kings who are noted for their wickedness attract a more complete formula.⁹⁹

Conclusions

The phrases, which introduce this narrative and the previous one, indicate that these narratives are not intended to be read chronologically after the narrative of the siege, and therefore, there is no reason to expect a marked difference in the characterization of Hezekiah from that in the earlier narrative. Comparisons with previous embassies to kings in Jerusalem reveal no basis for suspicion of the foreign visitors, and there is no indication that Hezekiah has done anything morally wrong or even, politically foolish. However, comparison of the Assyrians with the Babylonians suggests that the agenda is different in this narrative from the earlier one. That difference would appear not to lie in the characterization of Hezekiah, but in the purpose of the narrative.

In the present narrative, there is an interesting contrast and movement

⁹⁶ Uzza is considered by some scholars to be a Canaanite deity; see Gray, *I and II Kings*, p. 710.

⁹⁷ Thus, Bin-Nun, “Formulas”, p. 431.

⁹⁸ Thus, Provan, *Hezekiah*, p. 135-137.

⁹⁹ Bin-Nun (“Formulas”, p. 430) suggests “...that the final entry in the chronicle for the deceased king, which reported his death and burial, was made by his successor... Thus the brief note of Hezekiah’s death without mentioning his burial may be due to those who reigned for Manasseh, still a boy then of twelve years. Those who exercised power until Manasseh was grown up and influenced against the political and religious trend of his father, may have been ministers of Ahaz’s time, who had been removed by Hezekiah owing to their

between hearing and seeing. In 20:13, Hezekiah paid heed to the messengers (וַיִּשְׁמַע עֲלֵיהֶם). However, the use of שָׁמַע quickly gives way to רָאָה, as the emphasis moves to what was seen by the Babylonians, but whereas the Babylonians see, Hezekiah is bidden to hear (שָׁמַע) the word of YHWH (v. 16). רָאָה is used as a *leitwort*, but previous explanations of the narrative based upon its meaning alone have not been very satisfying. The significance of the term might reside in the notion of Hezekiah performing an action that is tantamount to a prophetic, symbolic action. At least that is how Isaiah seems to use it, although he did not command it. Isaiah's questions produce interesting responses from Hezekiah. What the Babylonians said is never revealed in contrast to the lengthy records of the speeches of the Assyrians, but the completeness of what was seen by the Babylonians and their coming from a distant land are clearly given emphasis. According to Deuteronomic law, Hezekiah was acting properly in his dealings with visitors from a distant land. The oracle of judgement pronounced by the prophet is accepted by Hezekiah without complaint. No prayer is offered, suggesting that this would be ineffective in these circumstances. Hezekiah's response (20:19) does not have to be understood as an expression of smugness or cynicism. Ackroyd's suggestion that the words are meant as an auspice seems unlikely. His other suggestion, which involves reading the narrative in conjunction with the record of the reforms of Hezekiah in 2 Kgs. 18:4 and the much longer elaboration of 2 Chron. 29-31, is suggestive and helpful. However, the present narrative could also be read alongside the siege narrative and this reveals further interesting contrasts between the speeches of the Assyrians and Hezekiah and their evaluations of the words of YHWH. If the evaluation of the Assyrians is accepted at face value, unless there is good evidence to the contrary, Hezekiah's evaluation of the word of YHWH as good seems valid and probably sincere. Hezekiah's second statement in 20:19 may equally be viewed as genuine relief at the delay of judgement, which he may have understood as reward for his trust in YHWH. There may also be the hint of a suggestion that what God has done once he can do again.

Chapter Five – The Function of the Hezekiah Narratives in the Book of Kings

Introduction

Having exegeted the text of the narratives concerning Hezekiah, it may be instructive now to look at the wider contexts in which they are set in the book of Kings and the book of Isaiah, again concentrating on the theme of faith. Thus, the present chapter will be concerned with the narratives within the context of the book of Kings and the wider Deuteronomistic History.

Several basic questions in the field of biblical criticism are raised by such an endeavour. First, the book of Kings is generally assumed to be part of a larger work, usually described as the Deuteronomistic History. Although our main reference is with regards to Kings, it has been necessary to consider scholarly work based on the wider context of the Deuteronomistic History. Although the term “Deuteronomistic History” is used in this study, it should be noted that some scholars have questioned whether the Deuteronomistic History really exists, or whether it is a conjecture of modern redaction criticism.¹ Secondly, even if its existence is assumed, it does not automatically follow that the work has an *intentional* theme or plot. Barton points out that “The Deuteronomistic History may not be a work written to explore a theme. It may be a compilation of materials only loosely held together.”² This, of course, might also be said to be the case with the book of

¹ The concept of a Deuteronomistic History has been questioned by several scholars from a variety of viewpoints in recent years. For a recent survey see Gary N. Knoppers, “Is there a Future for the Deuteronomistic History?” in Thomas Römer (ed.), *The Future of the Deuteronomistic History* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2000), pp. 119-134. In addition to the references given there see P.R. Davies, *In Search of Ancient Israel* (JSOTSup, 148; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), p. 131; Iain Provan, “On ‘Seeing’ the Trees While Missing the Forest: the Wisdom of Characters and Readers in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings”, in Edward Ball (ed.), *In Search of True Wisdom: Essays in Old Testament Interpretation in honour of Ronald E. Clements* (JSOTSup, 300; Sheffield: SAP, 1999), pp. 153-173 (159-162); Ernst Axel Knauf, “Does ‘Deuteronomistic Historiography’ (DtrH) Exist?”, in Albert de Pury, Thomas Römer and Jean-Daniel Macchi (eds.), *Israel Constructs its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (JSOTSup, 306; Sheffield: SAP, 2000), pp. 388-398.

² John Barton, “Historical Criticism and Literary Interpretation: Is There Any Common

Kings, even if taken on its own. However, as the approach in this study is a literary one, this is not necessarily a problem; Barton continues by stating, "Yet it is essentially recent literary criticism that has alerted us to the existence in modern writing, and hence potentially in ancient writings too, of apparently casual and unplanned works that are nevertheless not to be seen as accidental or meaningless, and which offers resources for interpreting and making sense of such literary puzzles."³ Thus, it may be possible, from a literary standpoint, to enquire of the text whether there is a plot for the whole book of Kings, possibly for the Deuteronomistic History, without becoming embroiled in a discussion about authorial intention.⁴ Older studies, though, tend to assume intention on the part of an author or redactor.

The work of several scholars, beginning with Noth, will be briefly surveyed in order to introduce the problem of discerning the meaning of Kings and how the Hezekiah narratives may be seen to fit into the context of Kings. Two literary approaches (by Mills and Nelson) will also be considered. Articles by McConville and Provan will be examined in more detail, before considering a different suggestion.

Noth and Reactions to His Work

According to Noth, the purpose of the Deuteronomistic History was to show that the end, to which Judah was subjected, was indeed a divine judgement.

Ground?" in S.E. Porter, P.M. Joyce and D.E. Orton (eds.), *Crossing the Boundaries: Essays in Biblical Studies in Honour of Michael D. Goulder* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), pp. 3-15 (14-15).

³ Barton, "Historical Criticism", pp. 14-15.

⁴ Whether it is possible to speak of authorial intention has been questioned by W. K. Wimsatt Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley ("The Intentional Fallacy" in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* [Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1954], pp. 3-18. They opine that a literary work belongs to the public rather than the author as "it is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it." However, the argument of the essay is not as severe as it may at first seem. Sternberg (*Poetics*, p. 8.) notes that the "debunked" fallacy refers to reliance on external intention gleaned from an understanding of the author's psychology or biography. See also Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text?* (Leicester: Apollos, 1998), pp. 82-85, 241-243, 256-259. Stephen E. Fowl, "The Role of Authorial Intention in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture" in Joel B. Green and Max Turner (eds.), *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 71-87.

The sin of Jeroboam sealed the fate of the northern kingdom, and the apostasy of Manasseh meant God's rejection of the southern kingdom. Furthermore, Noth saw this judgement as "definitive and final". Wolff, however, wonders why anyone in the sixth century BC would bother to reach for a pen to explain that the end of the history of Israel was due to God's judgement.⁵ According to Noth there is no historical purpose intended beyond the current situation; the release of the Davidic king, Jehoiachin, at the end of Kings (2 Kgs. 25:27-30) provides no hope.⁶

In his work, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, von Rad discusses what he terms "the deuteronomistic theology of history" as found in the book of Kings.⁷ He describes how the kings are judged by one main criterion, namely their devotion to YHWH based on their attitude towards centralized worship in Jerusalem. He also discusses the theme of oracle and fulfilment and conveniently lists several prophecies and their corresponding fulfilments in the book of Kings.⁸ Thus, the history of the two kingdoms is seen as the actualization of YHWH's will and word in history. The fate of the northern kingdom is sealed with the sin of its first independent king, Jeroboam I, but judgement was graciously withheld by YHWH for some two centuries. The longer divine forbearance in the case of the southern kingdom is due to the way in which David is regarded by the Deuteronomist as a king whose heart was perfect towards YHWH, walking in his ways. "He is the prototype of the perfectly obedient anointed, and therefore the model for all succeeding kings in Jerusalem."⁹ Hezekiah is briefly mentioned as one who did what was right as David had done. Thus, the Deuteronomist works with two given principles, the word of YHWH's judgement upon the transgressors of his

⁵ Wolff, "Kerygma", pp. 83-100.

⁶ Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup, 15; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), p. 98. Since the German original was written in the context of Nazi Germany, one wonders whether a punishment for the ancestors of the Jewish people would seem politically correct in the early 1940s.

⁷ Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (SBT; London: SCM, 1953), pp. 74-91.

⁸ Von Rad, *Studies*, pp. 78-81.

⁹ Von Rad, *Studies*, p. 88.

laws and the promissory word to David and his dynasty. Von Rad sees YHWH's words as active in the history of Judah as both "law, judging and destroying", and "as gospel - i.e., in the David prophecy, which was constantly being fulfilled - saving and forgiving."¹⁰ Then von Rad has to face the obvious question in view of the downfall of Judah and the exile: "Was the word of grace after all the weaker coefficient and was it finally driven from the field of history by the word of judgement?"¹¹ Von Rad refers to the palpable dilemma faced by the Deuteronomist at the end of his work. He could not reduce the severity of the judgement, but neither dare he believe that YHWH's promise to David had perished forever. Thus, von Rad attributes special significance to the final verses of 2 Kings regarding the release of Jehoiachin from prison. Jehoiachin is spoken to kindly, given a position above the other kings and allowed to eat at the king's table each day. Nothing is said which is theologically explicit, but von Rad sees a hint that YHWH may begin again if he wishes; the line of David is not necessarily finished. The Deuteronomist in his work presents a history of the word of YHWH that intervenes in both judgement and salvation, and moves towards a fulfilment.

Konkel,¹² following von Rad,¹³ sees the focus of the Deuteronomist in the book of Kings as being almost entirely upon the king, and the way in which his conduct seems to determine the future of Israel. Worship is also viewed as a central concern, but the king is also regarded as responsible for worship. It is not so much the good or evil actions *per se* which concern the Deuteronomist, but the decision for or against YHWH. Thus, the actions of Manasseh sealed Israel's fate despite the reforms of Josiah according to Konkel. However, if this is so, one wonders why Josiah's turning to YHWH with all his heart, soul and might (2 Kgs. 23:25), in conformity with the

¹⁰ Von Rad, *Studies*, p. 89.

¹¹ Von Rad, *Studies*, p.90.

¹² Konkel, *Hezekiah*, p. 142.

¹³ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology I* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), pp. 344-

Shema (Deut. 6:4-5) could not reverse that fate. Konkel comments regarding Hezekiah that he is the only king in the book of Kings besides Josiah to receive unrestricted approval. However, what might be considered to be the central focus of the reign of Josiah, and, on the above understanding, the main concern of the Deuteronomist, that is, the purity of the YHWH cult, is passed over briefly in the Hezekiah narratives (2 Kings 18:4,22). Konkel avers that Hezekiah's faithfulness is revealed and measured by his conduct in the face of the Assyrian threat. In arguing this way, Konkel diverges from von Rad, who asserted that "...the Deuteronomist makes absolutely no claim to appraise the kings at a given moment in relation to the particular historical situation confronting them."¹⁴ It may be that von Rad has overlooked the case of Hezekiah, where his faithfulness to YHWH is not only stated and supported by the report of his reforms, but is also worked out in the situation he faced.

As already noted, Von Rad maintained that the hope of the restoration of the Davidic line was evident in 2 Kgs. 25:27-30. Childs has also taken up this construal of the text, but feels that von Rad has not seen the issue as clearly as he might have, because he arrived at his messianic interpretation using traditio-historical methods, whereas Childs is at pains to emphasize the canonical shape of the text. Childs believes that the Deuteronomist's portrayal of David as a model king is part of an exegetical tradition that he refers to as canonical. The similarity of vocabulary in 2 Sam. 22 and in 1 Kgs 8-11 suggests to Childs that there was "...a common traditional understanding of the Davidic material which the two books shared."¹⁵ Childs accepts the theme of a messianic hope in Kings,¹⁶ but accepts that other

345.

¹⁴ Von Rad, *Studies*, p. 75.

¹⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979), p. 293.

¹⁶ The possibility of a messianic hope in Kings will be considered below, when Provan's work is discussed.

themes such as repentance, as propounded by Wolff,¹⁷ are also relevant to the future role of the book. He does not refer, however, to the role of the Hezekiah narratives in the Deuteronomistic History.

Wolff discusses the possibility of a future hope in his essay, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomic Historical Work",¹⁸ but without specifically mentioning the Hezekiah narratives. Wolff rejects both Noth's pessimistic understanding of the Deuteronomist's theology of history and von Rad's more positive assumption that the line of David may yet continue. Yet Wolff finds a note of hope in the theme of repentance in the sense that God will hear and answer their prayers, if they will repent and forsake their evil ways. It does not necessarily involve a restoration of the house of David; only a restoring of covenant between YHWH and his people is possibly suggested.

Cross recognizes, as did von Rad, two themes running through Kings: the sin of Jeroboam and the faithfulness of David. Cross resorts to positing a double redaction of the Deuteronomistic History to explain the two themes, and thus provide a possible resolution of the difference between Noth and von Rad.¹⁹ He accepts that there is a theme of grace present in the first redaction of the Deuteronomistic History which is dated to the time of Josiah, and thus a Davidic king is still on the throne. This theme was necessary, for it explained the divine forbearance towards so many Davidic kings of Judah who were judged to be sinful. On the other hand, the destruction of the Davidic city,

¹⁷ See Wolff, "Kerygma".

¹⁸ Wolff, "Kerygma". Frank Moore Cross ("The Themes of the Book of Kings and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History" in Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973], pp. 274-289 [277, n. 14]) deplores the anachronistic use of the term *kerygma*.

¹⁹ Cross, "Themes", pp. 276-277. R. Smend ("Das Gesetz und die Völker: ein Beitrag zur deuteronomistischen Redaktionsgeschichte" in H.W. Wolff [ed], *Probleme biblischer Theologie* [Festschrift G. von Rad; Munich: Kaiser, 1971], pp. 494-509) also propounded a theory of two redactional layers, but conceived them to be both exilic. A basic history (DtrG), which was optimistic in outlook, is said to have been supplemented by a legalistic layer (DtrN). See William Schniedewind ("The Problem with Kings: Recent Study of the Deuteronomistic History" *RelSRev* 22 [1996], pp. 22-27) for a review of more recent approaches to the composition of the Deuteronomistic History and a useful bibliography.

Jerusalem, and the deposing of the Davidic dynasty is dated by Cross to a second exilic edition of the Deuteronomistic History. Cross follows Wolff in seeing a number of passages in the work which hold out the prospect of restoration as reward for repentance, but Cross maintains that these belong to the exilic edition, whilst Wolff holds to a single edition. However, if the narrative is read in its received form, then the themes of sinfulness and consequent judgement, and the theme of promise and hope must be held in tension with one another in some way.

Levenson thinks that Cross's thesis has merit in that it illuminates a contradiction between the inalienability of Jerusalem and the Davidic line, and the conditionality of their continued existence upon the behaviour of the king. He accepts a theory of double redaction, but he posits the view that the second redactor was not only explaining the past, why the Judahite dynasty had fallen, but was also envisioning the possibility that a faithful royal exile might reclaim his throne.²⁰ A new relationship is established between the Babylonian emperor and the Judean king in Levenson's eyes. The words *וַיִּדְבֹּר אִתּוֹ מִבּוֹת* (2 Kgs. 25:28) suggest to Levenson that Evil-Merodach made a covenant with Jehoiachin. Jehoiachin's exaltation may have awakened hopes of a restoration. Thus, the last four verses of Kings are seen by Levenson as "part of an effort by an exilic Deuteronomistic source to bring the legacy of the promissory covenant with David into line with the new historical reality effected by the events of 587 B.C.E. and with the novel social and political situation of the continuing Diaspora. The last four verses of Kings announce in a cautious, nuanced way, that a scion of David, king of Israel, is yet alive and well."²¹ Levenson may well be reading too much into the last four verses of 2 Kings. This topic will be considered again below.

²⁰ Jon D. Levenson, "The Last Four Verses in Kings", *JBL* 103 (1984), pp. 353-361 (356).

²¹ Levenson, "Verses", p. 361.

Two Literary Approaches - Mills and Nelson

Mills considers a literary approach, arguing that modern scholars read stories such as those of Saul and David as continuous narrative.²² Basing her remarks on the work of F.A.J. Nielsen,²³ Mills contends that the Deuteronomistic History is comparable in several ways with Herodotus' *Histories*, and, therefore, she reads the whole work as a tragic narrative, but does not refer to the Hezekiah narratives. This "involves reading the text as an account of two main characters, God and Israel (a whole people)"²⁴ according to Mills. Israel's flaws are reflected upon in the narrative, and these lead to its destruction, despite the fact that God continually offers a blessing to Israel. She emphasizes the responsibility of Israel in bringing such consequences upon itself and compares this with Shakespearian tragedy. However, this seems to negate at least one of the points that she has culled from Nielsen's work, in particular, "...that the activity of the deity is often deceptive."²⁵ Mills concludes that Israel as a whole falls back from initial promise, and fails to live out its potential greatness. The lives of Saul and David are microcosms of this theme. "The tragic mode can be said to dominate since the end of each story is one of gloom."²⁶ The doom of the northern kingdom is foreshadowed by the erection of the calves, and "there is an overarching tragic narrative which continues from Solomon to the last Davidic king." Hezekiah and Josiah are good kings, but less significant than the majority who lead the people astray. Yet a literary reading does not have to assume that the Deuteronomistic History is totally tragic. The comparison with Greek tragedy is not as strong as Mills maintains. Mills herself refers to the work of Steiner,²⁷ and notes that "The presentation of catastrophe as punishment on sin removes, for Steiner, the open-ended nature of tragic

²² Mary E. Mills, *Historical Israel: Biblical Israel. Studying Joshua to 2 Kings* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 78-82.

²³ F.A.J. Nielsen, *The Tragedy in History* (JSOTSup, 251; Sheffield: SAP, 1997).

²⁴ Mills, *Historical Israel*, p. 79.

²⁵ Mills, *Historical Israel*, p. 79.

²⁶ Mills, *Historical Israel*, p. 82.

²⁷ G. Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961).

events in classical literature such as the *Iliad*.”²⁸ Reasons for the judgements are presented in Kings, and there is hope in that repentance will at least delay judgement, if not cancel it. The latter part of David’s and Solomon’s lives may be disappointing in the narrator’s eyes, but they are not completely without hope. In the wider context of the book of Kings, David becomes the paradigmatic king, by which later kings are measured. A literary reading does not have to be synonymous with a tragic reading.

In an article entitled “The Anatomy of the Book of Kings”, Nelson discusses the purpose for which Kings was written. He believes that Kings was not written only to provide information about Israel’s past, but also “...to effect a transformation of belief, a re-evaluation of identity.”²⁹ To aid him in his reading of Kings as a unified text he utilizes the methodology of Boris Uspensky, who suggests that point of view operates on different levels.³⁰

Thus, Nelson discusses evaluative points of view in 2 Kgs 18-20. The narrator’s assessment of Hezekiah, that he does what is pleasing to Yahweh, is shared by Hezekiah himself according to 2 Kgs 20:3. The Rabshakeh, however, evaluates Hezekiah as a destroyer of Yahweh’s shrines. Although events prove the Rabshakeh wrong, Nelson maintains that Yahweh himself undercuts the point of view of the narrator and Hezekiah. Since YHWH states that he will save Jerusalem for his own sake and that of David’s (2 Kgs 20:5-6), Hezekiah’s faithfulness seems to be immaterial in Nelson’s view.

A similar kind of distinction is made later, when Nelson distinguishes between the narrator and an implied author “...who may not have precisely the same point of view as the narrator who ostensibly tells the story. The non-concurrence of the ideological point of view of an implied author and the narrator employed by that implied author is a species of irony. The narrator

²⁸ Mills, *Historical Israel*, p. 80.

²⁹ Richard D. Nelson, “The Anatomy of the Book of Kings” *JSOT* 40 (1988), pp. 39-48 (40).

³⁰ Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley, 1973).

represents a point of view which becomes the object of the reader's critical evaluation under the guidance of hints from the implied author. I would suggest that something of this nature is going on in the book of Kings."³¹ Nelson seems to be suggesting that irony is a way of reading Kings. Certainly, there are ironies within the narratives, but it is questionable whether the whole book should be categorized as a giant irony. This would seem, however, to be the implication of Nelson's comments. He continues by suggesting that the reader is given a choice between following the narrator and thereby toeing "the deuteronomistic party line that God's motives and intentions for the future are transparently clear, that repentance is in order, but that not much can be expected from it in the sense of national restoration" or recognizing that there is a questioning of this official view which reveals God to be too independent to conform to deuteronomistic formulas. Nelson asserts, "A God who lies through the prophets, makes sweeping dynastic promises which fly in the face of deuteronomistic orthodoxy, and undercuts deuteronomistic principles to enforce Deuteronomic law may have some other surprises up the divine sleeve as well."³² Nelson recommends trusting in God alone, but not in "...those theologians who claim to speak for God - even the narrator of the book of Kings!"³³

There is not space to deal with Nelson's points in detail, but it is debatable whether, in the book of Kings, God is being depicted as the kind of "maverick" deity, which Nelson seems to suggest, or whether it is the case that certain truths about God are being deliberately held in tension, perhaps to indicate that God cannot be manipulated or manoeuvred by human beings,³⁴ or that sometimes God is seen to react in response to his people's actions and to deal with them in unexpected ways for their own benefit, as well as for the

³¹ Nelson, "Anatomy", p. 47.

³² Nelson, "Anatomy", p. 47.

³³ Nelson, "Anatomy", p. 48.

³⁴ Cf. J. Gordon McConville, "Narrative and Meaning in the Books of Kings", *Bib* 70 (1989), pp. 31-49 (33); Barry G. Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (JSOTSup, 46; Sheffield: SAP, 1987), pp. 184-187.

establishment of his sovereignty.

McConville

McConville apparently accepts the concept of a Deuteronomistic History, and he supports Noth's theory of a single final exilic author. Consequently, he is critical of Cross's theory of a double redaction, and contests Cross's contention that "Before the pericope on Manasseh [viz. 2 Kgs 21, 2-13] there is no hint in the Deuteronomistic history that hope in the Davidic house and in ultimate salvation is futile".³⁵ However, it is McConville's concern to find meaning in the narrative of the book of Kings that is most germane to the present study.³⁶ McConville may not be reading Kings from a literary viewpoint, but his acceptance of the unity of the book, and his belief that the work implies a coherent purpose, suggests the amenability of his study for our purposes.

Although McConville accepts the concept of a Deuteronomistic History, he states that the books preceding Kings are not univocal, working "with contrast, often through irony, to effect their meaning."³⁷ Thus, for example, he refers to Polzin, who has noted an incongruity in the allowance of Israel to possess the land despite previous disobedience. This flies in the face of the connection between obedience and land-possession in Deuteronomy. "The result is a theology of grace that overcomes law, and a message that runs counter, in Polzin's treatment, to many of the individual propositions in Deuteronomy."³⁸

McConville views the institutions of kingship and temple as beginning and

³⁵ McConville, "Narrative", pp. 44-45; Cross, "Themes", pp. 284-285.

³⁶ McConville ("Narrative", p. 33, n. 8) states, "The present article is based on the belief that it is natural to assume, until investigation proves otherwise, that DtH embodies a coherent purpose."

³⁷ McConville, "Narrative", p. 32.

³⁸ McConville, "Narrative", p. 33. However, the phrase, "a theology of grace that overcomes law", has a Pauline ring to it, which may not be helpful in attempting to undertake Old Testament theology.

continuing in compromise. The role of the kings is uncertain at the outset (1 Sam. 8:7-18) and David, despite receiving the dynastic promise (2 Sam. 7:18-29) is soon seen as a sinful and indecisive ruler. The temple's origins are also set in questionable circumstances (2 Sam. 24:15-25). It with such observations in mind that McConville comes to his understanding of the meaning of the book of Kings. Thus he comments, "Kings is arguably *all about* a loss of identity, of which loss of land is finally a function... The question Who is Israel? hangs over these books."³⁹ Together with the questionable origins of the institutions of kingship and temple, which, McConville suggests, seem to be the vehicles of Israel's hope, McConville further intimates that a close reading of Kings will reveal a discrepancy between surface statement and underlying meaning. He then supports his contention by referring to several key passages from Kings.

Solomon's reign is discussed at some length, and clues which suggest that all is not well are highlighted. Thus, even at the beginning of the reign, the marriage to Pharaoh's daughter in contradiction of Deut. 7:3 is noted. The building of the king's house before YHWH's house forces one to consider the priorities of Solomon. The use of the particle *כִּי* in 1 Kgs. 3:2-3 indicates a hint of irony. It is used by the narrator in several of the reigns of Judah's kings.⁴⁰ Solomon's character is seen as flawed from the beginning of his reign, and not as a gradual declension. This is a view that several scholars now take.⁴¹ In his prayer in 1 Kgs. 8, Solomon poignantly reflects that "there is no man who does not sin" (1 Kgs. 8:46). McConville sees this as ironical: "The irony is that he, perhaps as much as any of his successors, will demonstrate the proposition's truth, as the narrative will shortly make very clear."⁴² McConville also sees the comment as "an ironic counterpoint to

³⁹ McConville, "Narrative", p. 34 (author's italics).

⁴⁰ As already noted on pp. 36-37 above.

⁴¹ See, for example, Provan, *1 and 2 Kings* (NIBC), pp. 43-48; Provan, "'Seeing' the Trees", pp. 162-165; Jerome T. Walsh *1 Kings* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), pp. 66-68, 70-73, 84-85, 89-90, and 98-99; Hoffmann, *Reform*, pp. 50-56.

⁴² McConville, "Narrative", p. 36.

every positive evaluation of Solomon's successors, and stretches all the way to Josiah." However, this seems to be stretching the point somewhat, since the words found on the lips of Solomon are a truism, and might even be read as indicative of a genuinely humble attitude.

The phrase "for the sake of David my servant" is considered by McConville in the context of the division of the kingdom. He sees it as heightening the tension between the apparently unconditional dynastic promise of 2 Sam. 7 and the vulnerability of a kingdom dependent on its faithfulness to YHWH. The saying about a Davidic lamp appears for the last time in 2 Kgs. 8:19. The dropping of the phrase is viewed by McConville as an ominous indication of the way the narrative is going. The downward progression is also reflected in the increasingly more explicit conditionality of the promise as seen for example in comparing 2 Sam. 7:14 and 1 Kgs. 2:4. McConville sees in all this a growing tension that does not presage unqualified hope for the southern kingdom.

McConville comments briefly on Rehoboam, noting his refusal to accept good counsel, which reveals him to be a fool who has turned his back on the wisdom of Solomon and that of his generation. After briefly mentioning the reign of Asa, McConville considers the story of Jehoshaphat and, in particular, his alliances with Ahab and his son, Jehoram. These suggest a form of unity that proves to be deceptive. McConville comments, "The underlying issue in these stories is the status and destiny of Israel as a whole, the chosen people of God in their God-given territory."⁴³ In 1 Kgs. 22 Ahab appeals to Jehoshaphat to help him retake the city of Ramoth-gilead, and Jehoshaphat appears very willing to accept (vv. 3-4). Yet, although it seems that here is a cause that recalls Israel's holy war, the setting of the incident is immediately after Ahab's acquisition of Naboth's vineyard, where rightful inheritance is disregarded. The story concludes in death for Ahab and defeat

⁴³ McConville, "Narrative", p. 39.

for Jehoshaphat.

The relationship between the northern kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah is further explored by McConville. Although Ahab had died, there is a sense in which he lived on in Judah, for both Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, and Ahaziah, Jehoram's son, were related to Ahab through Athaliah, who was a granddaughter of Omri. Amaziah faced Jehoash, the king of Israel, in battle and was defeated. Although he lived fifteen years after the death of Jehoash, he died violently at the hands of conspirators. The narrator also makes a connection between the two kingdoms, which presages the ultimate fate of Judah: "Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah only. Judah also did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God, but walked in the customs which Israel had introduced" (2 Kgs. 17:18-19).

McConville then discusses what he sees as a contrary trend in the narrative, namely the movement towards "Reform".⁴⁴ He sees such a movement beginning with Asa, and developed by Joash. The reform of Joash in 2 Kgs. 12 is viewed as a disappointment; the question which McConville considers is whether this was due to personal inadequacy on Joash's part, or whether this is an indication of the inadequacy of reform to bring permanent betterment for Judah. McConville does not explicate what he means by such betterment, but presumably, it includes the survival of the Judean kingdom. McConville now comes to Hezekiah and states that "If Joash's Reform failed to produce the results which his obedience to the deuteronomic law might have led to expect, the same is more emphatically true of Hezekiah's."⁴⁵ He notes how positive the narrator's assessment of Hezekiah is (2 Kgs 18:1-8). McConville deduces that "The Reform trend is therefore

⁴⁴ McConville constantly spells the word with a capital letter, though he provides no explanation for this aberration.

⁴⁵ McConville, "Narrative", p. 42.

intensifying."⁴⁶ However, he fails to state that the actual reforms of Hezekiah in 2 Kings are limited to one verse (18:4) and that quite possibly this is not the main theme of the Hezekiah narratives. He rightly notes that the positive notices regarding the characterization of Hezekiah are followed by a note again of the fall of Samaria (18:9-12) and a record of the invasion of Judah by Sennacherib, which leaves Hezekiah surrounded in the enclave of Jerusalem. As McConville comments, this is the opposite of what one might have expected after hearing of Hezekiah's exemplary character. Land is lost and treasure from both the temple and the palace is handed over to Sennacherib.

An oracle of deliverance (20:6b) is followed in the next narrative by an oracle promising demise (20:17-18). McConville states that he is not sure as to what extent Hezekiah's own selfish concerns have brought about this turn of events. As argued above, it is not clear that Hezekiah was selfish,⁴⁷ but McConville is correct in noting the sharp contrast. (The deliverance probably refers to that from the Assyrians, whereas the demise will be at the hands of the Babylonians.) McConville argues, "The question whether any king in Jerusalem can usher in permanent salvation is by this stage very urgent."⁴⁸

Manasseh, as McConville notes, reverses the reforms of Hezekiah (21:3), and the promise to David and Solomon regarding the temple is reiterated in a way that shows it has been compromised (21:7-9). Judgement is now given against Judah through nameless prophets, because of Manasseh's sins. Josiah is depicted as the greatest fulfilment of Deuteronomic expectation (23:24-25), and the pendulum swings back towards Yahwistic worship. Yet the judgement pronounced against Judah because of Manasseh's wickedness still stands. This comes "as something of a shock",⁴⁹ but McConville seeks to

⁴⁶ McConville, "Narrative", p. 43.

⁴⁷ See, for example, pp. 176-178, 181.

⁴⁸ McConville, "Narrative", p. 43. However, it is not clear what McConville means by *permanent* salvation. Such a concept seems inappropriate in the context of Old Testament theology.

⁴⁹ McConville, "Narrative", p. 44.

show that the reforms of the supposed good kings are undermined all the way through the book. There is ambiguity regarding the kings from Solomon onwards. He has stated elsewhere that, "From the fact that reforms in 1,2 Kings typically fail to secure the covenantal blessings for Judah it follows, not that a better reform might have done the trick (which patently it did not), but that none ever could. The brilliant portrayal of Josiah's efforts makes this point with irony and force."⁵⁰

Theologically, McConville argues that, despite the ambiguity, there is much which suggests a theology of grace, and that the door is open for something new to happen between God and his people. He refers explicitly to 1 Kgs. 8:46-53, a passage that he has considered in a separate article, "1 Kings VIII 46-53 and the Deuteronomic Hope".⁵¹ In that article McConville argues that 1 Kgs. 8:46-53 consciously stands over against Deut. 30:1-10, but that the former passage deliberately distances itself from the Deuteronomy passage by failing to offer exiles a return to the land. He concludes that 1 Kgs. 8:46-53 is like Deut. 30:1-10 in affirming hope after the exile, but unlike it in refusing to go as far as offering a return to the land. Returning to his earlier article, we find McConville arguing that the text shows that God cannot be manipulated, and he utilizes the story of Hezekiah to confirm this; reform did not automatically bring salvation avers McConville, but perhaps it should also be noted that Hezekiah and his generation were exempted from exile. On the other hand, in spite of Jeroboam II's sinfulness, YHWH allowed Israel to be saved through their king (2 Kgs. 14:26-27). The hope which the narrator offers in the last few verses of Kings is not strong enough in McConville's view to indicate restoration to the land, nor probably to see a Davidic king back on the throne. There is hope that exile might not be the final word, that if they repent, YHWH may be compassionate towards them (cf. 1 Kgs. 8:46-

⁵⁰ J. Gordon McConville, *Grace in the End: Study in Deuteronomic Theology* (SOTBT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan; Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1993), p. 89.

⁵¹ J. Gordon McConville, "1 Kings VIII 46-53 and the Deuteronomic Hope", *VT* 42 (1992), pp. 67-79.

51). The solution of Deut. 30, which anticipates release from exile and restoration to the land, is not adopted by the author/redactor of Kings.

There is much in what McConville says that makes sense of the book of Kings, if it is to be read as a unity. If, as suggested in a previous chapter, Hezekiah is depicted in a better light than even McConville accepts, it only serves to highlight even further the contrast between him and his father and his son. The pendulum has been swinging between extreme negative and positive reforms; towards the end of the southern kingdom it is swinging violently, and indicates that the end is near.⁵²

Provan

Provan considers the question of whether messianism is to be found in Kings.⁵³ He begins by discussing the passage on which von Rad laid great stress, 2 Kgs. 25:27-30. He finds it noteworthy that it is recorded that Jehoiachin lived on, whereas Zedekiah is seen to dwell in obscurity (2 Kgs. 24:18-25:7).⁵⁴ Provan also argues that promise is a prominent theme in Kings, especially the promise to David in 2 Sam. 7, which is seen as unconditional on the one hand, and yet conditional upon the obedience of David's successors.⁵⁵ This tension is never fully resolved in Provan's view.

⁵² Cf. Hoffmann, *Reform*, pp. 146-155.

⁵³ Iain W. Provan, "The Messiah in the Book of Kings", in Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (eds.), *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), pp. 67-85.

⁵⁴ However, Donald F. Murray ("Of All the Years-or Fears? Jehoiachin in Babylon [2 Kings 25:27-30]", *JBL* 120 [2001], pp. 245-265 [261, n. 48]) argues that, for there to be any ray of hope of the restoration of Davidic monarchy, there must be some indication that Jehoiachin continues to live. "This is ... the Achilles' heel in the reading of the text offered by von Rad and his scholarly heirs" according to Murray. If the presenting of a throne above the other kings is seen as in some way fulfilling 1 Kgs. 2:4b ("... there shall not fail you a man on the throne of Israel"), then Murray argues that the throne is granted by a Babylonian king under the tutelage of a Babylonian god, not by YHWH. Murray also points out that there is no mention of a son to Jehoiachin in Kings. He acknowledges that other books state that it is so (1 Chron. 3:17-18; Jer. 22:28-30), but the lack of any mention in the Kings context that Jehoiachin had a son or sons does not strengthen the case of those who want to see a hope of a restoring of the Davidic line.

⁵⁵ It is not possible to enter into detailed discussion on this topic, but the comment of Philip E. Satterthwaite ("David in the Books of Samuel: A Messianic Hope" in Philip E.

Provan discerns a parallel between the reign of Ahab in the north and the later reigns of the southern kings, Manasseh and Josiah.⁵⁶ Manasseh, Provan tells us, is like Ahab in his building altars to Baal, and in his worship of idols (cf. 2 Kgs. 21:3 and 1 Kgs. 16:33). Josiah is like the repentant Ahab, and both avoid judgement in their own time because of their humble attitude before YHWH. As the young prince, Joash, survives the murderous plans of his grandmother, Athaliah, so Jehoiachin is to be seen as the unexpected survivor in a perilous situation. That parallels are meant to be drawn between certain characters and events in the Old Testament is no doubt true, but this seems perhaps a little too ingenious. It would be more plausible if the reign of Ahab were matched by the reign of one southern king, rather than two. Curiously, in Chronicles, Manasseh is depicted as not only a very wicked king, but also a repentant king. Yet there is no intimation of that in Kings. The circumstances of the survival of Joash in the northern kingdom are very different from those of Jehoiachin.

Provan concentrates on the reigns of the two least criticized kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, and on Solomon, who, although criticized, is described as being blessed by YHWH in unprecedented ways and extent. As noted above,⁵⁷ Hezekiah is represented as a figure especially similar to David. He did what

Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham [eds.], *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts* [Carlisle: Paternoster Press/Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995], pp. 41-65 [55]) may be apposite: "In my view, though this passage may speak of an unconditional (*i.e.*, eternal) commitment, it is perhaps truer to say that it is undetermined in this respect." He bases this supposition on the grounds that לְעוֹלָם and עַד-עוֹלָם do not necessarily mean "for ever" and that God is shown as revoking an earlier promise in 1 Sam. 2:30. Perhaps terms such as לְעוֹלָם and עַד-עוֹלָם should be understood as rhetorical rather than literal. It is difficult to see how an author or redactor could allow such blatant contradictions to stand, if he took such terms literally. Perhaps the sense is "in perpetuity"; no revocation is intended, but it is not ruled out in extreme circumstances. What might be learned theologically from 1 Sam. 2:27-36 and from the book of Kings is that it is dangerous to presume upon the promise of God, as if human actions will make no difference to God's dealings with us. The converse is also true. When obedience is forthcoming, this may be incorporated into the promise by God, and become a motivating force, as R.W.L. Moberly ("The Earliest Commentary on the Akedah", *VT* 38 [1988], pp. 302-323 [320-321]) suggests is the case in Gen 22:15-18. Both principles are found in Jer. 18:7-10. See the comments of R.W.L. Moberly in "God Is Not a Human", pp. 113-114.

⁵⁶ Provan, "The Messiah", pp. 74-76.

was right according to all that David had done (2 Kgs 18:3). His reforms were far reaching. His military exploits paralleled those of David; only David and Hezekiah are said to have defeated the Philistines; only of Hezekiah and David is it said that YHWH was with them. Hezekiah's trust in YHWH results in a great victory for the Judahite king. Provan compares it with David's slaying of Goliath. Interestingly, the term נִצָּחַן is not used in 1 Sam. 17, but it is clearly a great model of faith in the face of seemingly insurmountable circumstances. Hezekiah is depicted as the great man of faith, as his ancestor, David, is.

Josiah is a second Moses in Provan's eyes, but several scholars have likened Josiah to David. Although there are links with Moses, there are also links between Hezekiah and Moses.⁵⁸ There seems to be no good reason why, if one is associated with David, the other should be connected with Moses. The connections with Moses are there for both kings, but both are also depicted as Davidic kings, especially in the light of the charge given by David to Solomon (1 Kgs. 2:2-4).

Provan argues that if one wants examples of what an ideal king would be like in the eyes of the authors of Kings, then the descriptions of Solomon, Hezekiah, and Josiah give us clues. The point seems reasonable, at least in respect to Hezekiah and Josiah. Provan then asks, "Is this king a messianic figure?"⁵⁹ This he admits is debatable. He argues that, if a rigid separation is maintained between a this-worldly future hope and a truly eschatological, final age hope, then the book of Kings are not overtly messianic. However, Provan questions whether this is the case with Kings, and whether in practice one can easily distinguish along these lines. "How, precisely, does one tell the difference between a future-oriented, yet presently grounded, ideal of kingship and a messianic kingship in a body of texts where the language of

⁵⁷ See pp. 24, 29-32 above.

⁵⁸ See pp. 36, 49-50 above.

myth, with all its implications of ultimacy, is so readily applied to historical kings, and where the future is always described in terms of the past?" Provan proceeds by noting that Kings is linked with prophetic books, especially the book of Isaiah. There the words of Isa. 39:8 are followed immediately by the words of consolation in Isa. 40 without any death notice, unlike 2 Kgs. 20:21. Provan comments that the figure of Hezekiah has apparently become detached from its historical moorings and within the literary context of the book of Isaiah become as fully eschatological as Isa. 40-55.⁶⁰ Thus Hezekiah is seen, according to Provan, as a paradigmatic king in whose reign the promises were yet unfulfilled, but who points forward to another Davidic king yet to come. Provan may be right in the context of the book of Isaiah, but his messianic proposal is less convincing in the context of the book of Kings. It is doubtful whether the final four verses of Kings can sustain this notion.

An alternative proposal

To record at such length and with such great approval the righteous deeds and attitudes of Hezekiah and Josiah makes little sense, if the aim of the work is simply to demonstrate the inevitability of YHWH's judgement. There is an obvious lack of detail in many of the accounts of a king's reign. The reader is frequently directed to other sources for further information. The purpose is clearly not to give a detailed survey of each king's reign.⁶¹ Where particular kings are dealt with at length, it is usually due to their abnormal wickedness or righteousness, and possibly some didactic purpose is in view. That the book of Kings cannot simplistically be equated with tragedy is indicated by the fact that, in the cases of Hezekiah and Josiah, prophetic oracles were given that they themselves would not see the evil that was to befall Judah, and where judgement does eventually fall, reasons are provided for its implementation. Provan's messianic perspective is interesting, but it is

⁵⁹ Provan, "The Messiah", p. 80.

⁶⁰ Provan, "The Messiah", pp. 81-83.

⁶¹ Childs, *Introduction*, p. 288.

questionable whether it works in the context of Kings. McConville's work is attractive; to read the book against the negative factors of the majority of the kings' reigns, beginning with Solomon, leads us to expect a denouement involving judgement. At the same time, McConville alerts us to the possibility of a note of hope at the end. It seems impossible to represent fairly the book of Kings without some understanding of a tension between God's judgement and his forbearance. However, McConville has little to say about the main theme of the Hezekiah narratives, that of "trust". Hezekiah's reign as recorded in Kings deserves a more explicit explanation than simply to subsume it under the theme of "Reform".

Since there are no instances in the book of Kings of the word אֱמָנָה outside of 2 Kgs. 18-19, it is clear that no argument regarding the use of the term as a reason for inclusion in Kings is possible.⁶² There are only three occurrences of the verb in Genesis to Kings with a verbal or nominal usage,⁶³ so it would also be difficult on the basis of the word אֱמָנָה to connect the Hezekiah narratives lexically into this wider context.⁶⁴ Why has the author/redactor of Kings written or utilized these narratives, if "trust" is not a major theme of the book, or for that matter, of the Deuteronomistic History? Although אֱמָנָה may not be found, there are other words and phrases which are used to indicate a close relationship between people and YHWH or other gods, people, or things.

Olley has carefully analysed the use of אֱמָנָה in 2 Kgs. 18-19 and elsewhere in

⁶² Compare the fact that the terms אֱמָנָה and אֱמָנָה do not appear in Kings after the reign of Solomon. They are clearly *leitmotifs* that refer especially to Solomon, and to David.

⁶³ See p. 40 above.

⁶⁴ As Olley indicates ("Trust in the Lord", p. 63), the argument of J.W. Groves (*Actualization and interpretation in the Old Testament* [SBLDS, 86; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987], p. 197, n. 53), following Childs (*Assyrian Crisis*, p. 85), that "trust plays a more important role in the Deuteronomistic corpus than it does in Isaiah, and therefore is primarily an example of the Deuteronomistic hand at work in the formation of these stories" is fallacious. Gerald E. Gerbrandt (*Kingship*, p. 76, n. 85) also argues that Childs was wrong in seeing the term "trust" as central to the theology of the Deuteronomist.

the Old Testament. He asks what it means to rely on YHWH and what is the nature of the theological foundation of such a phrase. He suggests that clues are to be found in a sequential reading of the narrative in which the Rabshakeh uses **אֱמוּנָה**. The operative word here would seem to be “clues”, as it is questionable whether the reader should accept the Rabshakeh’s judgements, being the enemy of Judah. This is obviously the case when, for example, the Rabshakeh questions reliance upon YHWH. However, there are times when the words of the Rabshakeh seem to concur with similar statements in Isaiah and elsewhere. The first “false” confidence according to the Assyrian, is confidence in “mere words” (18:20). “Do you think that mere words are strategy and power for war? On whom do you rely, that you have rebelled against me?” The Rabshakeh accuses Hezekiah of relying on Egypt. The second instance of “false” confidence is in YHWH himself, which the Rabshakeh suggests is misplaced, because he has misinterpreted the reforms of Hezekiah (18:22, cf. 18:4). Olley notes that “While centralisation is significant elsewhere to the Deuteronomist, neither Kings nor Isaiah in fact sees centralisation itself (as distinct from worship of YHWH alone) as conveying ‘merit’ that warrants security.”⁶⁵ A reliance on Egypt for chariots and horsemen is the third (18:23-24). The fourth is “false” confidence in Hezekiah himself, as he encourages his people to rely on YHWH (18:30). Fifthly, trust in YHWH himself is considered “false” confidence. The Rabshakeh reckons YHWH to be no more capable of delivering his people than any of the other gods of the nations defeated by the Assyrians. As Olley also notes, the prayer of Hezekiah (19:15-19) “is based solely on the kingship of YHWH, maker of heaven and earth, the living God, over all heaven and earth, over all ‘kingdoms of the earth’. The motive of the petition is that ‘all kingdoms on earth may know that you, YHWH, are God alone.’”⁶⁶ As noted above,⁶⁷ the use of **אֱמוּנָה** in other books such as Psalms, Proverbs, Jeremiah and Ezekiel suggests a similar meaning. Trusting in

⁶⁵ Olley, ““Trust in the LORD””, p. 65.

⁶⁶ Olley, ““Trust in the LORD””, p. 65.

material wealth, military strength, idols, even the Jerusalem temple, is contrasted with trusting in YHWH. Whereas trust in YHWH is evidenced by the worship of one God, trust in other things is often connected with the worship of other gods and/or the practice of injustice.⁶⁸

It should be noted that although נִבְטַח only appears in 2 Kgs. 18-19, it does not follow that ch. 20 should be left out of the discussion. It has already been seen that Hezekiah's illness may be symbolic of the Assyrian attack,⁶⁹ and his faith, made evident by his prayer to YHWH (20:3), provides a parallel to his confidence in YHWH in the time of that attack. The second part of the chapter (20:12-19) provides a counterpart to 18:13-16. In the latter section, treasure is given to the Assyrians, and in the former, it is foretold that treasure will be yielded to the Babylonians. Paying tribute to Assyria fails to prevent the Assyrian siege, and treasure will, in the future, not avert the deportation of Hezekiah's descendants. Thus, as van den Berg suggests, these passages may be intended to indicate the unreliability of earthly possessions.⁷⁰ Furthermore, he argues that they enclose the core of 18:17-20:11, where the central theme is trust. He continues by placing 18:17-37, where the Rabshakeh casts doubt on faith in YHWH and other agencies, over against 20:1-11, in which Hezekiah recovers from sickness. "The two discussed passages have the theme 'trust in YHWH' in common. Rabshakeh tries to undermine it, Hezekiah holds on to it."⁷¹ Van den Berg's basic schema is as follows:

⁶⁷ See pp. 40-43.

⁶⁸ Olley, "Trust in the LORD", p. 73.

⁶⁹ See pp. 149-150 above.

⁷⁰ Evert van den Berg, "Fact and Imagination in the History of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18-20", in J.W. Dyk, P.J. Midden, K. Spronk et al. (eds.), *Unless Someone Guide Me* (Festschrift Karel A. Deurloo; Amsterdamse Cahiers Supplement Series 2; Maastricht: Uitgeverij Shaker Publishing, 2001), pp. 129-136 (130).

⁷¹ Van den Berg, "Fact and Imagination", p. 131.

A 18:13-16 treasures to Assyria

B 18:17-37 Rabshakeh speaks: do not trust in YHWH

C 19:1-37 centre

B 20:1-11 Hezekiah trusts in YHWH and recovers

A 20:12-19 treasures to Babylon.

The outline seems a little forced, as 18:17-37 and 19:1-37 would seem to belong together,⁷² but it is interesting that he sees the various narratives as all relating to the theme of trust.

Since “trust” is not a theme that is overtly mentioned in the rest of the book of Kings, it seems appropriate to look for some other theme that might be seen to connect the Hezekiah narratives with the remainder of the book. The way in which אֱמוּנָה is used indicates that trust in YHWH is contrasted with other sources of supposed strength such as horses and other nations. It might, therefore, be worth considering a theme, which arguably can be seen to run throughout the major part of the book of Kings, and which is significant in reading the book as a whole. That is the theme of a contest between YHWH and other gods. The book might be understood as a polemic against the worship of gods other than YHWH, and might be seen as an exhortation to follow YHWH. It is in connection with this theme that the Hezekiah narratives, especially as they give expression to the notion of trust, may be seen to fit into the book of Kings. The theme is found in Solomon’s reign.

⁷² Van den Berg goes on to develop a concentric schema for the central section (19:1-19:37), which is rather elaborate and strained:

A 19:1-4 *it came to pass*: Hezekiah from *the temple* of YHWH: Isaiah, help!

B¹ 5-7 Isaiah to Hezekiah: *Thus says the LORD*: Do not fear!

B² 8-9a raid of Tirhakah > Rabshakeh *returns*

C¹ 9b-13 Sennacherib to Hezekiah: YHWH *does not* help

C² 14-19 Hezekiah prays in the temple

B¹ 20-34 Isaiah to Hezekiah: *Thus says the LORD*: prayer will be heard

B² 35-36 *it came to pass*: angel of YHWH > Sennacherib *returns*

A 19:37 *it came to pass*: Sennacherib murdered *in the temple* of Nisroch

After the eight days of feasting following the dedication of the temple, YHWH speaks to Solomon, promising that if Solomon will walk before him as David had, then the throne will be occupied by his descendants. However, if Solomon serves and worships foreign gods, exile is threatened for Israel, and the temple will be cast out of YHWH's sight (1 Kgs. 9:6, cf. v.9). Despite this warning, Solomon's heart was not wholly true to YHWH (וְלֹא־הָיָה לְקִבּוֹ שְׁלֵם עִם־יְהוָה) (1 Kgs. 11:4); he did not wholly follow YHWH (וְלֹא מְלֵא אַחֲרֵי יְהוָה) (11:6); he even built high places for at least two foreign gods. This in turn attracts a rejoinder from YHWH and a warning of the coming division of the kingdom, because "his heart had turned away (נָטָה) from the LORD, the God of Israel ..." (11:9). בָּטָח may not be found, but the language indicates a close relationship between YHWH and king. After the division of the kingdom Jeroboam built the calf-gods at Bethel and Dan (12:28-30) and sacrificed to them (12:32). It is noteworthy that again this religious innovation does not go unchallenged, for an unnamed man of God cries out against the altar and predicts that a Davidide named Josiah will sacrifice the priests of the high places upon the altar and that it will be torn down (13:1-3, cf. 14:9-10). These texts, placed at the end of Solomon's reign and during the reign of Jeroboam, first king of Israel (the northern kingdom), may be seen as programmatic.⁷³

Ahab is credited with the dubious honour of provoking YHWH to anger more than all the Israelite kings which were before him, because he served and worshipped Baal (16:31-33, cf. 21:25-26; 22:54). It is noteworthy that it is during his reign that the prophet Elijah makes his sudden entrance. It is in the Elijah-Elisha narratives that the theme of a contest between YHWH and other

⁷³ Cf. Hoffmann, *Reform*, p. 47. Hoffmann also specifies the cultic activity during Rehoboam's reign (1 Kgs. 12:25-33). Thus, it is noteworthy that at the beginning of the history of the southern kingdom, attention is drawn to the building of high places, pillars, and Asherim by Judah. There is no prophetic oracle of condemnation in this case, however. Possibly the oracle given to Solomon is considered to cover the southern kingdom, or there is no immediate threat because of the promise given to Solomon that one tribe would be given to his son for the sake of David and Jerusalem (1 Kgs. 11:13).

gods is perhaps most pronounced. In particular, Leah Bronner has endeavoured to show how the Elijah-Elisha narratives demonstrate the clash between YHWH and Baal. The miracles attributed to these men are, she avers, not to be rationalized away or treated as legendary additions to a historical core, but are "...important weapons employed by the narrator of these cycles to expose the incompetence of Baal, and the numerous functions that the myths ascribed to him."⁷⁴ She discusses several "motifs" including fire, rain, oil, corn, healing, resurrection, ascent and river. Her main thesis is that the gifts and powers attributed to Baal are in reality the gifts of YHWH. Thus, for example, the Canaanites believed that Baal sent forth rain and fire and had the power to heal and raise the dead. The miraculous stories ascribed to the two Israelite prophets are recorded to show that these are attributes of YHWH alone. For example, fire plays a prominent part in the Elijah narratives. Bronner tries to show that Baal was a god who controlled fire and lightning, as well as being a god of rain and fertility. She refers to a limestone stele depicting Baal brandishing a club in one hand and a spear in the other. The club appears to represent thunder, and the spear may suggest lightning, although a sacred tree or plant is also a possible explanation.⁷⁵ However, she also cites several Ugaritic texts, which she understands to indicate that Baal was in control of fire.⁷⁶

Fire plays a central role in the contest on Mount Carmel. During Ahab's reign Elijah commanded the king to assemble the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah at Mount Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:19). Ahab is accused by Elijah of forsaking the commandments of YHWH and following

⁷⁴ Leah Bronner, *The Stories of Elijah and Elisha as Polemics against Baal Worship* (Pretoria Oriental Series 6; Leiden: Brill, 1968), p. x. There are many other interpretations of the Elijah-Elisha narratives including, for example, that of T.W. Overholt ("Elijah and Elisha in the Context of Israelite Religion" in S.B. Reid [ed], *Prophets and Paradigms* [Sheffield: SAP, 1996]), who argues that Elijah and Elisha are represented by these stories as "shamans". Rick D. Moore (*God Saves* [JSOTSup, 95; Sheffield: SAP, 1990], p. 150), reflecting only on three of the Elisha stories in 2 Kgs. 5-6, views them as "didactic salvation stories set against the Aramean military threat of ninth-century Israel".

⁷⁵ Bronner, *Stories*, pp. 55-56.

⁷⁶ Bronner, *Stories*, pp. 57-62.

the Baals (18:18). Similarly, the people of Israel are asked “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him” (18:21). Elijah is depicted as seeing YHWH and Baal as mutually exclusive; YHWH will not be set as another god beside other gods. Thus, Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to see which god, Baal or YHWH, will answer by fire. The altar built by Elijah is drenched with water, yet the fire falls upon his sacrifice. The people then confess, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God” (18:39). After Elijah’s flight to Horeb, he is commanded to stand on the mountain before God. Wind is followed by earthquake and fire, but YHWH is not in any of these (19:11-12). Bronner comments, “Perhaps the purpose was to show that God possessed all the attributes of a rain and storm god, but was not part of nature, but above it and controlled all elements.”⁷⁷

In the chapter immediately before the Hezekiah narratives, during the reign of Hezekiah’s father, Ahaz, the fall of Samaria is described and the reason is given that they served idols and set up high places, pillars, and Asherim. The climax in respect of projected judgement for Judah is reached in the reign of Manasseh, who reversed the reforms of his father, Hezekiah (21:3). The fall of Jerusalem is predicated upon the evil actions of Manasseh (21:11-15). This judgement is repeated through the prophetess, Huldah, in the time of Josiah, who is promised to be spared the sight of this evil (22:15-20). Between the reign of Ahaz and Manasseh lie the Hezekiah narratives. They are thus in this significant position, after the fall of the northern kingdom and before the reign of the Judahite king whose deeds precipitate the judgement on the southern kingdom. It is in 2 Kgs. 19:14-28 that the contest between YHWH and Sennacherib comes to the fore. As seen above,⁷⁸ Hezekiah prays directly to YHWH himself, and YHWH is depicted as not only the God of Israel, but as the creator of heaven and earth. YHWH is thus seen as not just

⁷⁷ Bronner, *Stories*, p. 63.

⁷⁸ See ch. 3 above.

another god who may be tossed into the fire, but also the God who is sovereign over all nations, including Assyria. Sennacherib has made claims that are seen as blasphemous, claiming actions of which YHWH alone is capable (see 19:23-24 especially).⁷⁹ Thus, he sets himself up as a rival to YHWH, and pays the consequences. The trust in YHWH and his servant, Hezekiah, which Sennacherib has sought to undermine, is shown to be well founded.

Conclusions

Attempts to find authorial intention in historical-critical studies have tended to concentrate upon the kings and the possibility, or otherwise, of the continuation of the Davidic line. Endeavours to characterize the narratives as a particular literary *genre*, such as tragedy, tend also to focus upon the human outcome. To set the human characters against the background of a battle between YHWH and lesser deities, puts the human lives into a different perspective. What matters most in such a view is the sovereignty of YHWH and the need for the human characters to be in proper relationship with him, as might be expressed by Torah obedience (cf. Josiah 2 Kgs. 23:25). As regards the Hezekiah narratives, the writer of 2 Kgs. 18-20 in a wonderfully ironic way demonstrates the importance of trust in YHWH. As McConville has shown, Hezekiah's efforts were not able to turn away fully the impending judgement upon Judah, but Hezekiah and his comrades are depicted as seeing victory over Sennacherib and the Assyrians, and are spared the ignominy and distress of exile. More importantly, YHWH is seen as victorious over Sennacherib, and his god, Nisroch. Although the root נִשְׂרָךְ may not appear elsewhere in Kings, these chapters fit in well with the theme of a contest between YHWH and other gods. This theme, whether or not the intention of the author/redactor, may be seen as providing a meaningful placement for the Hezekiah narratives in the book of Kings.

⁷⁹ See pp. 97-99 above. Van den Berg ("Fact and Imagination", p. 132), because he sees ch. 19 as being framed by verses 1 and 37, which are set in the temple of YHWH and the temple

of Nisroch respectively, sees a struggle between YHWH and the Assyrian god, Nisroch.

Chapter Six – The Theme of Faith in Book of Isaiah

Introduction

In this chapter, the function of the narratives within the book of Isaiah will be explored with particular reference to the theme of faith. A brief review of recent work on the whole book of Isaiah is followed by an analysis of the origin, function, and status of chs. 36-39. Then the study focuses on the comparisons and contrasts between the narratives and ch. 7. The remainder of the chapter concentrates on an exegesis of ch. 7, especially those elements that may be considered relevant to an understanding of the meaning of faith in the book of Isaiah.

The Book of Isaiah

As with the Old Testament as a whole, Isaiah is continually being subjected to new ways of reading and interpretation. Tate has categorized the three main approaches to the book as "... the one-prophet interpretation, the three-book interpretation, and the one-book of Isaiah interpretation".¹ However, a rigid dichotomy cannot always be maintained between the second and third of these approaches, as is evident in Tate's article where, for example, he discusses the work of Clements in both of these categories. Tate cites the commentaries of J. N. Oswalt and J. A. Motyer as representative of the one author view, but indicates that Motyer gives a stronger emphasis to literary matters.² According to this view, Isaiah of Jerusalem is assumed to be the author of the whole book. However, the three-book interpretation is the one, which has dominated the scholarly scene since 1892 when B. Duhm published his commentary.³ "First Isaiah", "Second Isaiah" and "Third Isaiah" are now familiar terms within the theological household. The division into three parts or collections of material is widely assumed, and Bible dictionaries and commentaries have frequently treated them separately during

¹ M.E. Tate, "The Book of Isaiah in Recent Study", in J.W. Watts and P.R. House (eds.), *Forming Prophetic Literature, Essays on Isaiah and the Twelve in Honor of John D.W. Watts* (Sheffield: SAP, 1996), p. 25.

² Tate, "Recent Study", pp. 26-27.

³ Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (GHAT III/1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).

the twentieth century. Yet, not all scholars who accept the three-book interpretation agree that these originally existed independently.⁴

Attention has focused more recently on the one-book interpretation. As early as 1976, Melugin perceived that chapters 40-55 were "somehow related to the whole of Isaiah."⁵ He noted the lack of superscription to this section and the lack of a prophetic call within it. Although Isaiah 40:1-8 is seen by some to be a prophetic commissioning, Melugin considered the passage to refer ambiguously to both the prophet and the people. The absence of specific information about this prophet is also very noticeable. Melugin asks a very pertinent question: "Why did the redactor not place the prophetic utterances of chapters 40-55 in the context of the ministry of a sixth century prophet?" His answer is: "He did not, I suspect, because he was interested in the continuity of the prophetic word, i.e. the relationship between the word given to Isaiah 'in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah' (Isaiah 1,1) concerning the events of that time and the divine word in connection with the exile to Babylon."⁶ Melugin suggests that 1:4-9 was understood by the redactor to reflect the time of Hezekiah and that the judgement of 22:14 and 30:13-14 was delayed until the exile. The redactor thus juxtaposed chapters 40-55 to chapter 39.⁷ In his final paragraph, Melugin states his underlying conviction that there is an one-sidedness inherent in the preoccupation of historical critical scholars with trying to ascertain the original text and its process of growth. He urges a move towards "literary or kerygmatic exegesis."⁸ Melugin's wish has clearly been fulfilled in the past two decades.

⁴ Compare Childs (*Introduction*, p. 329) who states, "In the light of the present shape of the book of Isaiah the question must be seriously raised if the material of Second Isaiah in fact ever circulated in Isaiah apart from its being connected to an earlier form of First Isaiah." Christopher R. Seitz, "Isaiah 1-66: Making Sense of the Whole", in Christopher R. Seitz (ed.), *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 105-126 (111) has argued, "The whole notion of Second and Third Isaiah depends in no small part on there being a clear First Isaiah. Such an Isaiah is not to be found." On the relationship of second Isaiah to first Isaiah, see especially Williamson, *Book*.

⁵ R. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40-55* (BZAW, 141; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1976), p. 176.

⁶ Melugin, *Formation*, p.177.

⁷ Melugin, *Formation*, p.178.

⁸ Melugin, *Formation*, p.178.

While maintaining a historical-critical approach, Clements has noted that prophecies have been grouped together in Isaiah "... in a thematic fashion."⁹ One example that he gives is in Isaiah 13:1-14:23 where various prophecies regarding the relationship of Israel and Babylon have been collected together. Clements also believes that chapters 36-39 have been taken from 2 Kgs 18-20 to aid the reader to move into the second part of the book (chs. 40-66). He concludes that "All of these considerations are sufficient to indicate that the overall structure of the book shows signs of editorial planning and that, at some stage in its growth, attempts were made to read and interpret the book as a whole."¹⁰ He propounds that the conjoining of chapters 40 ff. onto the preceding chapters was "... for a profoundly religious reason."¹¹ He perceives a thematic connection concerned with the future of Jerusalem and the Davidic dynasty. In an article published in 1985, Clements expounds his thesis that the material found in chapters 40-55 was intended both to supplement first Isaiah and to influence the way it was interpreted.¹² Again, he discusses several themes, in particular the election of Israel, and Israel's blindness and deafness, to show that there are conscious connections between second Isaiah and first Isaiah.¹³

Sweeney has sought to interpret the first part of Isaiah (chapters 1-39) by looking at the redaction of the whole book. He speaks of both synthesis and analysis; the final form of the book is examined first (synthesis), then he considers how the text came to be in that form, concentrating especially on chapters 1-4.¹⁴ In his view, some of the material has been influenced and interpreted in such a way as to serve the purpose of a late-exilic or post-exilic

⁹ Ronald E. Clements, "The Unity of the Book of Isaiah", *Int* 36 (1982), pp. 117-129 (120).

¹⁰ Clements, "Unity", p.121.

¹¹ Clements, "Unity", p.128.

¹² Ronald E. Clements, "Beyond Tradition History: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah's Themes", *JSOT* 31 (1985), pp. 95-113.

¹³ Clements has recently revisited the question of the unity of the book of Isaiah in his article, "Isaiah: A Book without an Ending?", *JSOT* 97 (2002), pp. 109-126. Following in the tradition of Duhm's three-book thesis, Clements suggests that a "Fourth Isaiah" should be recognized within "First Isaiah". "They (chs. 24-27 and 34-35) are taken to have been composed independently at a very late time and then retrospectively, and inexplicably, inserted into the earliest division of the Isaiah scroll. Duhm should really have had a 'Fourth Isaiah' in order to explain them!" (p. 118).

¹⁴ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4*, pp. 7-8.

community. He concludes that there is a distinction between the message of the original texts and the teaching of the book as a whole. Thus, for example, messages of judgement against Jerusalem are now set in a context of coming salvation, which he sees as the teaching of the book in its final redaction.

In a later article, Sweeney argues that the book achieved its final form in the fifth century BC, at the time of the reform programme of Ezra and Nehemiah.¹⁵ This programme, he asserts, was based on the Mosaic torah and he sees an analogy between the torah's role in those reforms and its revelation in Isaiah. Brief mention might also be made of Rolf Rendtorff's article of 1984, "Zur Komposition des Buches Jesaja",¹⁶ where a number of key themes and terms, mainly from Isaiah chapter 40, are considered in their relation to their use in first and third Isaiah. He also believes that the message of judgement in first Isaiah has been re-interpreted by the post-exilic community in the light of second Isaiah's message of salvation.

Again, Seitz has moved beyond just asking traditional questions regarding authorship and redaction to inquire about the function of the narratives in their present context. He is interested in the use of language and how that has shaped the addition of further layers onto the earlier Isaianic traditions. He views the book not so much as a combination of three independent blocks of material, which have commonly become known as First, Second and Third Isaiah, but as a body of literature that has been developed rather like a house which has been extended several times. Seitz uses the analogy, now much quoted, of a farmhouse with its various extensions.¹⁷ As in the case of the house, that additions have been made to the book is obvious, but they have been included in such a way as to blend well with what is already in existence.

¹⁵ Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Book of Isaiah as Prophetic Torah", in Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney (eds.), *New Visions of Isaiah* (JSOTSup, 214; Sheffield: SAP, 1996), pp. 50-67.

¹⁶ Rolf Rendtorff, "Zur Komposition des Buches Jesaja", *VT* 34 (1984), pp. 295-320.

¹⁷ Seitz, "Isaiah 1-66", pp. 107-109.

Mention must also be made of B.S. Childs, whose chapter about the Book of Isaiah has had considerable impact.¹⁸ The canonical approach focuses on the final form of the biblical books in relationship to their becoming a part of the canon. Childs is neither seeking a return to pre-critical times, although he often finds value in works that predate the modern era, nor is he rejecting all the findings of historical-critical scholarship.

Many of the above approaches have been concerned with the redaction of the book and a development can be discerned from the three-book interpretation towards a one-book interpretation. Similarly, diachronic approaches have given way to synchronic ones, although some scholars combine the two. The synchronic approach involves reading texts, which may have originated at different times and from different sources as part of a whole book. The emphasis has moved away from questions regarding the original meaning of the text, its "authenticity"¹⁹ or otherwise, and how and when it became incorporated into the book, to the meaning of the text in relation to its context in the final form of the book. Rendtorff has advocated such a synchronic reading, and asserts, "In general, I believe that a changing view on the book of Isaiah should allow, and even require, studies on topics, themes, expressions, and even ideas characteristic of the book as a whole or considerable parts of it, without at the same time discussing questions of redaction or composition."²⁰ Such synchronic approaches have been provided by Conrad,²¹ Miscal,²² and Konkel²³ among others.

Conrad considers repetitions in vocabulary, theme and rhetorical devices within the text to be clues to its structural unity. Yet, he is interested not only with the text, but also with the relationship between it and the reader. One of

¹⁸ Childs, *Introduction*, pp. 311-338.

¹⁹ See p. 8 n. 14 above.

²⁰ Rolf Rendtorff, "The Book of Isaiah: A Complex Unity. A Synchronic and Diachronic Reading", in Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney (eds.), *New Visions of Isaiah* (JSOTSup, 214; Sheffield: SAP, 1996), pp. 32-49 (44).

²¹ Edgar W. Conrad, *Reading Isaiah* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

²² Miscal, *Isaiah*.

²³ Konkel, *Hezekiah*.

the key themes he isolates is the “the Lord’s plan”.²⁴ The Hezekiah narratives are considered to represent the partial fulfilment of YHWH’s plan as regards Assyria; this provides a basis for the readers to believe that YHWH will be successful in his strategy against all the nations of the world. The failure of the Syro-Ephraimite alliance also signifies the inability of other nations to succeed against YHWH. Conrad views the text of Isaiah not as a historical record, but as a vision for the future that provides hope for its audience. The narrative sections, chs. 6-8 and 36-39, are important in Conrad’s view, for they are seen as the contexts for the interpretation of the poetry surrounding them.

Miscall also assumes a unified work, produced probably in the fifth century. Like Conrad, he conceives of the book as a vision and, therefore, concentrates on imagery, language, and intertextuality within the book. The vision is presented as a quasi-drama; the book is full of dramatic speeches, even in the narrative sections, chs. 6-8 and 36-39. The vision is of God’s dealings with humanity in the past, the present and the future. “The vision is meant to move and to motivate its readers. They should trust in the Lord and in his ways as depicted in Isaiah and live their lives and structure their society accordingly.”²⁵

Konkel looks for a theme that runs through the book of Isaiah, and examines the role of the Hezekiah narratives in relation to that theme. Taking his lead from Dumbrell²⁶ and Vriezen,²⁷ he sees the overall *leitmotif* of the book as YHWH’s devotion to the city of Jerusalem.²⁸ The city is spared through the faith of Hezekiah, but is then doomed to exile. Although, according to Konkel, the first part of Isaiah ends in judgement (Isa. 39), the song of

²⁴ Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, pp. 52-82.

²⁵ Miscall, *Isaiah*, p.17.

²⁶ W.J. Dumbrell, “The Purpose of the Book of Isaiah”, *TynBul* 36 (1985), pp. 111-128 (112-113).

²⁷ Theodorus C. Vriezen, “Essentials of the Theology of Isaiah”, in B.W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (eds.), *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage* (Festschrift J. Muilenburg; London: SCM, 1962), pp. 129-130.

²⁸ Konkel, *Hezekiah*, p. 192.

Hezekiah, which is found only in Isaiah (38:10-20) points to the possibility of restoration for the people of Zion. Hezekiah's faith cannot evade the judgement that is due, but points to the quality of life demanded by the prophet Isaiah.²⁹ Konkel, therefore, focuses his attention on the tension perceived to exist in Isaiah's attitude towards the city.

Isaiah 36-39

We shall now focus on some recent work on the Hezekiah narratives in the book of Isaiah, and, because the main focus of this study is the theme of faith, we shall concentrate on ch. 7 and its relationship to chs. 36-39. In recent years there have been significant shifts of opinion regarding the origin, function and status of the section, chs. 36-39.³⁰ Since the work of Gesenius on the book of Isaiah it has generally been accepted that the accounts in 2 Kings had primacy over Isaiah 36-39, as the latter had the appearance of an appendix tacked on to the end of First Isaiah.³¹ One of the main arguments for the primacy of Kings, and the adaptation of the narratives into the Isaianic context, is the fact that two elements are unique to the book of Isaiah. The first is Hezekiah's psalm (38:10-20) and the second is the addition of the term **צְבָאוֹת** in three places (Isa. 37:16, 32; 39:5), which is common in both first and second Isaiah, but not in the Deuteronomistic History.³² Smelik, however, has argued that, whereas 2 Kgs 18:17- 20:19 does not fit well into the context of that book, because it "... is the only place in Kings where a prophet whose sayings have been recorded in the Latter Prophets appears in a narrative",³³ the book of Isaiah contains narratives not found in Kings where Isaiah is prominent. Isaiah 7 is given as an example of this.³⁴ Smelik thinks that the order of the material seems to be more logical in its Isaianic setting

²⁹ Konkel, *Hezekiah*, pp. 215-216.

³⁰ For a recent survey of authorship, primacy and function of the narratives see Mbuwayesango, *Defense of Zion*, pp. 8-44. On the redaction history of Isa. 36-39 see Raymond F Person, "II Kings 18-20 and Isaiah 36-39: A Text Critical Case Study in the Redaction History of the Book of Isaiah", *ZAW* 111 (1999), pp. 373-379.

³¹ F.H.W. Gesenius, *Philologisch-kritischer und historischer Commentar über den Jesaia*, II (Leipzig: FCW Vogel, 1821), pp. 932-943.

³² Groves, *Actualization*, pp. 196-197.

³³ Smelik, *Converting*, p. 97.

³⁴ Smelik, *Converting*, p. 98.

than in the book of Kings and that the existence of poetic material in the book of Kings is unusual. He further suggests that Isaiah 36-39 functions as “an editorial bridge”³⁵ between First and Second Isaiah, and was not an addition to First Isaiah in the way that Jer. 52 seems to be to the rest of the book of Jeremiah.³⁶ It is possible to counter Smelik’s first argument by arguing that material could have been deliberately taken from 2 Kings in order to parallel the material in Isaiah 7. Regarding the notion of chs. 36-39 forming a bridge between First and Second Isaiah, Williamson has examined the links between Isaiah 36-39 and both the earlier chapters of the book as they now stand, and chs. 40-55. While he finds that the connections with earlier chapters such as ch. 7 provide some evidence of a writer who was “...familiar with the earlier Isaianic tradition”,³⁷ the links with Deutero-Isaiah do not seem very strong to Williamson, who, therefore, concludes that there is not enough evidence to support Smelik’s contention that chs. 36-39 were written with the express purpose of forming a bridge between the first and second parts of Isaiah.³⁸

Seitz believes that there was one narrative, which is now preserved in Isaiah 36-37, that was composed for *both* contexts, the Deuteronomistic History and a Proto-Isaiah collection.³⁹ Nevertheless, one has to ask the question whether it is likely someone wrote with both the Deuteronomistic History and writings of Isaiah in mind at the same time. The discussion so far has included the possibilities that the material may have been composed for the Deuteronomistic History or for the book of Isaiah or for both. As Williamson has noted there is also the possibility of an independent source used by both canonical works, or of an independent source used first in Kings and then in Isaiah.⁴⁰ Williamson eventually comes to the conclusion that chs. 36-39

³⁵ Smelik, *Converting*, p. 101. Cf. Gonçalves, *L'expédition*, p. 342.

³⁶ Similarly, Barry G. Webb (“Zion in Transformation: A Literary Approach to Isaiah”, in D.J.A. Clines, S.E. Fowl and S.E. Porter [eds.], *The Bible in Three Dimensions* [Sheffield: JSOT Press 1990], pp. 65-84 [69]) views chs. 36-39 as distinct from the preceding and subsequent poetic material, yet structurally integrated into the wider context of the book.

³⁷ Williamson, *Book*, p. 194.

³⁸ Williamson, *Book*, p. 197.

³⁹ Seitz, *Destiny*, p. 141.

⁴⁰ Williamson, *Book*, p. 194. Compare the view of Konkel, who sees the Hezekiah stories in Isaiah as originating from a source different from that of the text of 2 Kings. A pre-masoretic text has been adapted for use in the two different contexts. See August H. Konkel, “The

came into being in circles that valued Isaiah's words and were later incorporated into the book of Kings. From there an editor of Isaiah borrowed these narratives and made a few changes, especially the omission of 2 Kings 18:14-16.⁴¹ Thus, he explains the Isaianic influence upon this section whilst maintaining the primacy of Kings over Isaiah. He dates chs. 36-39 to some time after that of Deutero-Isaiah. In contrast, Seitz maintains that chs. 36-39 were written before the time of Deutero-Isaiah and that these chapters forwardly influenced chs. 40-55. He views chs. 36-38 as being loosened from their historical setting and placed "... in the larger context of God's dealings with Zion and the nations"⁴² and chapter 39 as an anticipation of when the Babylonian threat would replace the Assyrian.⁴³

Whatever the primacy of the Hezekiah narratives, it is clear that there are many connections between these chapters and other parts of Isaiah. Groves has conveniently listed several such connections with first Isaiah.⁴⁴ He notes that (i) Shebna and Eliakim (36:3) are also mentioned in 22:15-25; (ii) that there is an emphasis on 'trust' in the Rabshakeh's speeches, which recalls 30:15; (iii) that Egypt, for all her chariots and horses (36:6, 9), is seen as impotent, a fact reminiscent of Isaiah's anti-Egyptian oracles (30:1-5; 31:1-3); (iv) that the boasting of the king of Assyria (37:23-25) finds echoes in the anti-Assyrian oracles such as 10:8-11.⁴⁵ Groves has also noted some connections between the Hezekiah narratives and second Isaiah, but most examples are taken from one small section, the poem in 37:23-29.⁴⁶

Sources of the Story of Hezekiah in the Book of Isaiah", *VT* 43 (1993), pp. 462-482 and Konkel, *Hezekiah*, pp. 171-190.

⁴¹ Williamson, *Book*, p. 209.

⁴² Seitz, *Word without End*, p. 208.

⁴³ Seitz, *Word without End*, pp. 208-209.

⁴⁴ Groves, *Actualization*, pp. 197-198.

⁴⁵ Williamson (*Book*, pp.192-193) adds several more points, and makes similar comments in his *Variations*, pp. 89-90. See also Mbuwayesango, *Defense of Zion*, *passim*. Mbuwayesango exegetes Isa. 36-39 with the intention of finding thematic connections with chs. 1-35. She tries to demonstrate that the narratives were composed as a commentary on what Isaiah of Jerusalem was thought to have prophesied regarding the Assyrian crisis.

⁴⁶ Groves, *Actualization*, pp. 198-199.

The second and third of the above points are of particular interest for the study of the theme of faith. Williamson, in discussing the original home of the Hezekiah narratives, argues that "...the occurrence of a relatively common word like *bṭḥ* cannot take us very far."⁴⁷ Yet, as Olley has noted, this does not take into account the distribution of the verb *בָּטַח*.⁴⁸ While its occurrence in Genesis-Kings is rare,⁴⁹ there are seventeen references to the root in the book of Isaiah outside of chs. 36-39.⁵⁰ This indicates that there are thematic and linguistic links with other parts of Isaiah that are more obvious than is the case in the book of Kings.

Two references seem particularly relevant to our theme: Isa. 30:15 and 31:1. In Isaiah 30:15-16 we read: "For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, 'In returning (*שׁוּבָה*) and rest (*נַחַת*) you shall be saved; in quietness (*הַשְׁקֵט*) and in trust (*בְּטָחָה*) shall be your strength.' And you would not, but you said, 'No! We will speed upon horses,' therefore you shall speed away; and, 'We will ride upon swift steeds,' therefore your pursuers shall be swift." There are several words which suggest links with Isa. 7:4-9, which is examined below.⁵¹ Trust here is understood as returning to YHWH, if the traditional interpretation of *שׁוּבָה* is followed. "Rest" and "quietness" may suggest a contrast with frantic negotiations with Egypt. Olley notes that those who rely on Egypt, are those who refuse to listen to YHWH's instruction (30:9), and who trust (*בָּטַח*) in oppression (30:12).⁵² Trust in YHWH is seen as tied to a sense of justice, and having moral consequences. Trusting in YHWH is accompanied here by a promise of deliverance, which, as Wong notes, is a common theme.⁵³ It is also reminiscent of the deliverance of Jerusalem, where Hezekiah's trust in YHWH is rewarded with deliverance from the Assyrians (Isa. 36-37). The use of military means is not necessarily

⁴⁷ Williamson, *Book*, p. 193.

⁴⁸ Olley, "Trust", p. 66.

⁴⁹ See p. 40 above.

⁵⁰ Isa. 12:2; 14:30; 26:3, 4; 30:12, 15; 31:1; 32:9, 10, 11, 17, 18; 42:17; 47:8, 10; 50:10; 59:4;

⁵¹ For a full discussion of the various interpretations of particular words see Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, pp. 52-70.

⁵² Olley, "Trust", p. 67.

⁵³ Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 60.

denounced;⁵⁴ it is help from Egypt and reliance on weapons, because they have become substitutes for trusting solely in YHWH, which are decried.⁵⁵

Similar themes are apparent in 31:1: “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely (יִשָּׁן) on horses, who trust (יִבְטְחוּ) in chariots because they are many and in horsemen because they are very strong, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the LORD!” Reliance on military strength and alliance with Egypt are linked. Those who behave in this way are “workers of iniquity” and “evildoers”, and are distinguished from those who look to YHWH and seek him, so again a link is assumed between trusting in YHWH and moral behaviour.

Isaiah 36-39 and Isaiah 7

Within the book of Isaiah, the literary relationship between chs. 36-39 and the other so-called “royal narrative”, ch. 7, is very strong. Several scholars have noted the connections between these passages in recent years. The descriptions of the reigns of King Ahaz and King Hezekiah have been compared and contrasted, although the exact limits of the units, which have been discussed, vary from scholar to scholar. Ackroyd was among the first to draw attention to the possible relationship between Isa. 6:1-9:6 and Isa. 36-39.⁵⁶ In the second half of his article, he focuses on the way in which chs. 36-39 function as part of Isaiah. He notes that in the past it has been common to consider these chapters as really belonging to 2 Kings 18-20 and that little was said regarding their position in, or effect upon, the book of Isaiah.⁵⁷ Conrad compares what he terms the “Ahaz narrative” and the “Hezekiah narrative”.⁵⁸ By the “Ahaz narrative” Conrad is referring to ch. 7 only and not the whole of the so-called *Denkschrift* as considered in Ackroyd’s study.

⁵⁴ Von Rad’s view that this verse excludes all military activity is discussed on pp. 26-27 below.

⁵⁵ On this question see Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 60; Olley, “Trust”, p. 68.

⁵⁶ Peter R. Ackroyd, “Isaiah 36-39: Structure and Function”, in Peter R. Ackroyd, *Studies in the Religious Tradition of the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1987), pp. 105-120.

⁵⁷ Ackroyd (“Isaiah 36-39”, p.115) draws attention to the fact that his own commentary in the Interpreter’s One Volume Commentary was limited by editorial restraint to discussing only the verses in Isaiah 36-39 which were different from the narrative in 2 Kings 18-20.

⁵⁸ Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, pp. 34-51. This appears to be a revision of his “Royal Narratives and the Structure of the Book of Isaiah”, *JSOT* 41 (1988), pp. 67-81.

Evans follows Brownlee in supposing that the canonical book of Isaiah was deliberately edited as a two volume work made up of chs. 1-33 and chs. 34-66.⁵⁹ This thesis is based partly on evidence from Qumran scrolls, but more so, on the observation of parallels between different sections of the book. Brownlee believed that the author of Isaiah borrowed from the same source as the author of Kings and that the material, which is the same as 2 Kings 18:13-20:19, was placed in the book of Isaiah. He argued that Isa. 6-8, the biography of Isaiah and Ahaz, was paralleled by chs. 36-39, the biography of Isaiah and Hezekiah.⁶⁰ Seitz in his book, *Zion's Final Destiny*, has sought to trace the development of traditions in First Isaiah by focusing on a particular theological problem, that of the promise to Zion. He assesses Isaiah 36-39 and the function of this section within the book and in so doing discusses the status of Hezekiah and the place of royal theology within it. Seitz asserts that Hezekiah is shown to be "the promised faithful counterpoint to a disbelieving and therefore disestablished Ahaz in fulfilment of 7:14; 9:1-7."⁶¹ It can be seen from the brief discussion above that, although these different scholars in the course of their research have referred to the relationship of the Ahaz and Hezekiah narratives in the book of Isaiah, it was for various reasons. Yet, whatever the aims and approaches of their studies, the connections between the two sections of the book, are patent.⁶²

Since many of the above scholars make similar comments about the links between the royal narratives, it is more convenient to concentrate on the work

⁵⁹ Craig A. Evans, "On the Unity and Parallel Structure of Isaiah", *VT* 38 (1988), pp. 129-147 (132); W.H. Brownlee, *The Meaning of the Qumrân Scrolls for the Bible: With Special Attention to the Book of Isaiah* (New York: OUP, 1964), pp. 247-259.

⁶⁰ Brownlee, *Qumrân Scrolls*, p. 249.

⁶¹ Seitz, *Word without End*, p. 204. See also Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 64-65; Seitz, *Destiny*, pp. 89-90.

⁶² Other scholars who have referred to these connections include Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (London: SPCK, 1984), pp. 109-110; Smelik, *Converting*, pp. 99-100; Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4*, pp. 12-13; Williamson, *Variations*, pp. 87-88; Uwe Becker, *Jesaja – von der Botschaft zum Buch* (FRLANT, 178; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), pp. 28-29; O'Connell *Concentricity*, p. 87 n. 1.

of Conrad, who gives one of the fullest lists of the similarities between the narratives.⁶³ These are summarized here as follows:

- 1) Both passages begin with a threat against Jerusalem (7:1; 36:2).
- 2) The place of the confrontation of the king and the prophet is identical in both narratives (7:3; 36:2).
- 3) There is a sense of distress because of the threat of invasion (7:2; 37:1).
- 4) Both narratives contain the comforting oracle: "Do not fear" (7:4; 37:6).
- 5) Signs are offered to both kings, although Ahaz refuses his (7:10-16; 37:30-32).
- 6) Both narratives end on an ominous note even though the king and Jerusalem are spared each time. The Assyrian king is mentioned as the threat in ch. 7, whereas it is Babylon that will bring disaster on Jerusalem in the Hezekiah narrative.

Conrad also discusses the differences between the royal narratives, the main one being the depiction of the character of each king.⁶⁴ While Ahaz only speaks one sentence (7:12), Hezekiah speaks to Isaiah, to YHWH, and to his ministers. He plays a more prominent role than Ahaz. Later, Ahaz just seems to fade from the scene, while Hezekiah has the last word (Isa. 39:8). Other differences include the contrast between the power of the Assyrian threat ranged against Hezekiah and the impotence of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition in Ahaz's day. Rezin and Pekah are never given the chance to speak, unlike the Assyrian King, Sennacherib, who sends three messages in total. Conrad also sees links between the two narratives, because, like Seitz, he supports the identification of Immanuel with Hezekiah.⁶⁵ Not only is the Assyrian crisis foreshadowed in the prediction of the coming of the Assyrian king (7:17), but the assurance of God's help in that situation seems to be adumbrated by the birth of the son whose name means "God with us". The actions of Hezekiah during the so-called siege of Jerusalem "illustrate how he

⁶³ Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, pp. 38-40.

⁶⁴ Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, p. 41-46.

⁶⁵ Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, p. 43. Other scholars who support this view include Ackroyd, "Isaiah 36-39", p. 119; Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy*, pp. 109-110.

fulfils this symbolic name”, according to Conrad.⁶⁶ While Ahaz’s speech and actions suggest that he does not want God to be with him, Hezekiah actively seeks help from YHWH. Hezekiah claims to have walked in faithfulness (בְּאֵמֶת) before YHWH (38:3), but Ahaz needs to be challenged to believe (7:9b).

Isaiah 6:1-9:6

Before focusing on Isaiah 7:1-17, the context in which it is found is briefly examined. The section 6:1-9:6 has been regarded as a memoir (*Denkschrift*) by many scholars.⁶⁷ Yet, if there ever were such a unit, it appears to have been drastically changed. The change from first person singular in ch. 6 to third person singular in ch. 7, then back to first person in ch. 8 is particularly noticeable.⁶⁸ Although some scholars have asserted that a redactor has made this alteration,⁶⁹ there is no textual evidence for this.⁷⁰ It should also be noted that ch. 6 is not the first occurrence of the first person singular in the book as we now have it; see 5:1 and 5:9. This suggests that 6:1-9:6 should not be viewed as completely independent of ch. 5. Seitz notes how well 5:9 links with the revelation of ch. 6: “The LORD of hosts has sworn in my hearing...”⁷¹ Chapter six is often considered to be a call narrative, which describes the prophetic call of Isaiah. Its present position in the book, rather than at the beginning, as is the case in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is often thought to be due to the clumsiness of later editors. Yet the identification of ch. 6 as Isaiah’s call has been questioned. It has been argued

⁶⁶ Conrad, *Reading Isaiah*, p. 44.

⁶⁷ According to Williamson (*Variations*, pp. 73-74), it was Karl Budde, who first used the term *Denkschrift* in “Zwei Beobachtungen zum alten Eingang des Buches Jesaja”, *ZAW* 38 (1919-1920), p. 58, although he had first propounded his theory back in 1885. There is not space in this study to discuss the *Denkschrift* thesis in detail, but Williamson (*Variations*, pp. 73-101) provides a useful and critical introduction to it. See Becker (*Jesaja*, pp. 21-60), who also criticizes this theory and especially the retention of ch. 7 as the core of the memoir.

⁶⁸ Childs (*Isaiah: A Commentary*, p. 62) argues that the hypothesis of a *Denkschrift* has led to considerable confusion vis-à-vis the interpretative issue. “The third person form of chapter 7 strongly resists its being encapsulated within a larger autobiographical unit along with chapters 6 and 8.”

⁶⁹ See, for example, Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1972), p.87.

⁷⁰ John H. Hayes and Stuart A. Irvine, *Isaiah, the Eighth Century Prophet: His Times & His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), p.116.

⁷¹ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 52.

by both Seitz and Williamson that it is closer in form to Micaiah's vision in I Kings 22:19ff. than to the calls of, for example, Jeremiah or Moses.⁷² Several scholars, for example, Gitay,⁷³ and Miscall,⁷⁴ have categorically stated that Isa. 6 is not a call narrative. The vision is reminiscent of a royal audience. God is seen as seated upon a throne. There may be an implicit contrast made between the king of the universe and the king of Judah, Uzziah. The chapter begins by stating that this revelation was given in the year of King Uzziah's death. The heavenly king reigns forever, but earthly kings come and go. It is a time of change and the Assyrian threat is beginning to menace the smaller kingdoms. Chapter six, in its canonical position, would seem to be a commissioning for the difficult ministry which Isaiah will face in view of the hardness of heart and spiritual blindness and deafness of the people (Is. 6:9-10), rather than an initial call to be a prophet. Perhaps it was a secondary call to see if Isaiah was willing to continue his ministry. Links may be discerned between ch. 6 and ch. 7. The contrast between the heavenly king and another earthly king, i.e. Ahaz are noticeable. Ahaz is portrayed as a vacillating and frightened ruler in contrast to the LORD of hosts. Ahaz may also be seen as the first example, perhaps the example *par excellence*, of a person blind to the spiritual forces underlying his political quandary, an unbelieving man whose heart is hardened to the word of YHWH brought to him by Isaiah.

Isaiah 7

Introduction

The way in which ch. 7 is presented is somewhat complex. Verses 1-2 appear, at first sight, to provide an introductory narrative summary, which is then followed by the monologue delivered by YHWH to Isaiah (vv. 3-9) and the dialogue between YHWH and King Ahaz (vv. 10-25). However, v. 1,

⁷² Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 54. (There is a typographical error in Seitz, where the reference is incorrectly given as "II Kings".) Williamson, *Variations*, pp. 83-86. See also Williamson's footnote (p. 84 n. 11), which gives a useful bibliography of scholars who have queried Isa. 6 as an account of a call-vision, but which does not include the references in the following two footnotes.

⁷³ Yehoshua Gitay, *Isaiah and His Audience: The Structure and Meaning of Isaiah 1-12* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1991), p. 119.

⁷⁴ Miscall, *Isaiah*, p. 34.

which is often viewed as a later addition to the unit,⁷⁵ seems to present a proleptic and synoptic summary of the event.⁷⁶ The historical context it provides is duplicated to some extent by the mention in v. 2 of the alliance between Aram and Ephraim.⁷⁷ Furthermore, according to v. 2, the siege has not yet taken place, so the inability of Rezin and Pekah to conquer Jerusalem seems to refer to the eventual outcome of the situation.⁷⁸ This may suggest that v. 1 is a brief synoptic narrative summary, which is then picked up and expanded in the following verses. Although vv. 3-9 consist of YHWH's speech directed at Isaiah, it is difficult not to surmise that Ahaz is present, or that he has made an appearance at some point during the speech. These verses also seem to describe the circumstances in which the dialogue between YHWH/Isaiah and Ahaz took place.⁷⁹ Although vv. 10-25 ostensibly represent a dialogue between YHWH and Ahaz, it seems likely that the reader is intended to understand that the message was delivered through Isaiah. However, Ahaz's contribution is minimal; this section is composed mainly of an oracle announcing the Immanuel sign and the consequences attendant to that sign.

In the Old Testament, stories of a prophet going to meet a king, as opposed to a helpless king seeking help from a prophet, generally centre on a sin or act of disobedience on the king's part, but not always. For example, in 2 Sam. 12:1 YHWH sends Nathan to King David to challenge him regarding his sin with Bathsheba. Here a parable is used in an ironic, almost cunning way to convict David of his misdemeanour. Ahab is confronted by Elijah who is explicitly told by YHWH to go to meet the king (1 Kgs 21:18). Ahab is then condemned because of the incident involving Naboth and his vineyard (21:1-

⁷⁵ It is debatable whether 7:1 is dependent on 2 Kgs 16:5 and if it is, whether it was taken from a written account or an oral tradition. For more detailed discussion see, for example, Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 6; S.A. Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz and the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis* (SBLDS, 123; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), pp. 136-137.

⁷⁶ See above on 2 Kgs 20:7 (p. 147).

⁷⁷ Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39* (FOTL, 16; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 152.

⁷⁸ Seitz (*Isaiah 1-39*, pp. 75-76), however, assumes that the events of v. 1 have taken place before vv. 2ff; a military attack has failed, so the coalition of Syria and Ephraim is trying something new, the terrorizing of Jerusalem in order to set up a new king. According to this view, v. 1 should be seen as just the first stage of a campaign against Ahaz. Cf. F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, (Commentary on the OT in Ten Volumes by Keil and Delitzsch, VII; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 207.

⁷⁹ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 145.

16). Sometimes no explicit command from YHWH is recorded, but this might well be implied, as in the case of Ahab again, who had provoked YHWH to anger more than any previous king of Israel according to 1 Kgs 16:33. Elijah also prophesies the coming of drought to Ahab (1 Kgs 17:1), but there is no explicit statement that YHWH sent him. Occasionally, there are variations recorded, as in 2 Kgs 1:3, where it is the angel of YHWH, rather than YHWH himself, who commands Elijah to arise and go to meet the messengers of Ahaziah, the king of Samaria, rather than the king himself. The details may vary, but when a prophet seeks out a king, it is usually to deliver a message of judgement. The king may be repentant or not, but the purpose is to challenge the king regarding his actions. However, there are exceptions, which make it difficult to insist that the visit of a king by a prophet amounts to a “type scene” in the sense discussed by Alter in his *The Art of Biblical Narrative*.⁸⁰ Thus, when an unnamed prophet draws near to Ahab in 1 Kgs 20:13 it is with a promise from YHWH that the Syrian multitude will be given into Ahab’s hands. In 20:22, the same prophet encourages Ahab to consider his position and forewarns him that the king of Syria will attack him again in the spring. In the discussion of 2 Kgs 20:1 (Isa. 38:1) the present writer has endeavoured to demonstrate that the notice of Hezekiah’s death, which is announced by Isaiah, does not necessarily imply that Hezekiah has committed some heinous sin.⁸¹

In the case of Isaiah meeting with Ahaz, there is not an obvious threat of judgement at first, and there does not seem to be an explicit sin at the beginning. Some scholars believe that Isaiah is being portrayed as encouraging Ahaz. Yet, as the scene continues, and Ahaz reveals his unwillingness to ask for a sign, judgement appears to be announced. Even before this, his fear of his enemies might be interpreted as indicative of his lack of faith in YHWH. Whether the sign of Immanuel is a judgement is debatable, but vv. 17-25 strongly indicate a message of judgement. It cannot be assumed that Ahaz is being judged at the beginning, but as the narrative unfurls, his reaction to the oracles appears to precipitate judgement.

⁸⁰ Alter, *Narrative*, pp. 47-62; Sternberg, *Poetics*, pp. 349-364).

⁸¹ See ch. 3 above.

7:1

Besides being a thematic summary, this verse may be considered to serve several functions. First, the mention of Uzziah may seem unusual, as just the name of Ahaz's father would normally have been given, but it seems to serve as a link between the following narrative and the previous chapter, since Isaiah's vision took place in the year of Uzziah's death.⁸² Yet, precisely why the link might be made is not certain. Some scholars, however, including Seitz, think it possible that Jotham and Ahaz reigned as co-regents, which might explain the inclusion of Uzziah's name as father of Jotham.⁸³ Secondly, although the mention of the inability of the coalition to take Jerusalem may be said to anticipate the end of the war, and thus, rob the narrative of its surprise,⁸⁴ it is possible that this has been done deliberately to undermine the character of Ahaz in the eyes of the reader. It "... undermines Ahaz's resistance to YHWH's promise of salvation through Isaiah."⁸⁵ The reader is deliberately told of the favourable (from the Judahite perspective) outcome of the war, which contrasts with, and thus, emphasizes the fearfulness of Ahaz in the mind of the reader. It is also interesting to note that Isaiah never designates Ahaz as "King Ahaz".⁸⁶ Possibly, this is an indication of the prophet's, or more probably, the narrator's, estimation of Ahaz. It may suggest that Ahaz may not be regarded as fit for the role of king.

7:2

The narrator sets the scene in v. 2, describing the reaction of fear of the Davidic house and the people at the news of the coalition between Aram and Ephraim, or the encampment of the Aramaic army within the borders of Israel, depending on how one reads the MT.⁸⁷ Thus, as is often the case, the

⁸² Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 87.

⁸³ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 68.

⁸⁴ W. Werner, "Vom Prophetenwort zur Prophetentheologie: Ein redaktionkritischer Versuch zu Jes. 6, 1-8, 18," *BZ NF* 29 (1985), pp. 1-30.

⁸⁵ Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 152. Sweeney also posits the view that 7:1 has a role in connecting this chapter with chs. 36-39. This is possibly correct, but 7:3 makes a more specific link.

⁸⁶ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 68.

⁸⁷ The meaning of מִן־יְהוּדָה in v. 2 is debated. If it means "to settle down/ rest", or as H. Wildberger (*Isaiah 1-12* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991], p.283) suggests, "to allow

narrator is able to discern emotions. The phrase **בֵּית דָּוִד** may appear to be an unnecessary circumlocution in place of Ahaz. Most commentators see Ahaz as representative of the Davidic dynasty;⁸⁸ the house of David is personified in Ahaz, so his decision will determine the destiny of the dynasty, not just his own.⁸⁹ The fact that **לִבָּבוֹ** comes before **עַמּוֹ** would suggest that the primary reference of the phrase “the house of David” is to the king.⁹⁰ When Isaiah is read in its wider canonical context there may appear to the careful reader to be resonances with the use of **לֵב** in the David narratives in Samuel. The term **לֵב** is admittedly very common in the Old Testament, but it does seem to play a significant role in the narratives about David. Compare, for example, 1 Sam. 13:14, where Samuel announces to Saul, “But now your kingdom shall not continue; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart (**לֵב**).”⁹¹

There might be a word play between the verb **נָחָה**, and the root **נָחַ** in this verse. If the meaning of **נָחָה** were “rest/settle down” from the root **נָחַ** it would make an interesting contrast with **נָעַ** “to shake/wave”. Syria settles itself down causing Judah to shake.

oneself to settle down upon, fall down upon”, as in 7:19, it suggests that Syrian troops are encamped in Ephraim. The other main possibility is the meaning “to become allied with” which was suggested by G.R. Driver (“Studies in the Vocabulary of the Old Testament VI”, *JTS* 34 [1933], p. 377). Again, more detailed discussion of textual matters may be found in Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 7, and in Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, pp. 138-139.

⁸⁸ However, Gitay (*Audience*, p. 132) takes the phrase, “house of David” to refer to the royal family.

⁸⁹ For example, Grikhus Gakuru (*An Inner-Biblical Exegetical Study of the Davidic Covenant and the Dynastic Promise* [MBPS, 58; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000], p. 165) understands the passage to indicate that the threat to the Davidic dynasty is real.

⁹⁰ The pronominal suffix of **לִבָּבוֹ** (and, for that matter **עַמּוֹ**) may refer either to Ahaz or to the house of David. Modern translations generally take the words to refer to Ahaz. As, for example, Wildberger (*Isaiah 1-12*, p. 294) argues, the suffix of **לִבָּבוֹ** must refer to Ahaz, as one does not speak of the heart of a house. Irvine (*Isaiah, Ahaz*, p.138, n. 16) cites Wildberger’s comment, but suggests that it is possible to follow the NJPSV in translating the phrase as “their hearts and the hearts of their people trembled...” The implication of this translation appears to be that the house of David is being treated as a collective entity. Irvine himself translates the phrase thus: “its resolve and the resolve of its people”. On balance, however, since it is possible that the king and the house may be seen to be so closely identified with one another, and that the king is the representative *par excellence* of the dynasty, it seems best to follow Wildberger.

⁹¹ Compare also 1 Sam. 16:7; 17:28; 21:13; 2 Sam. 7:3.

Isaiah uses an ironical metaphor when he states that the heart of Ahaz and the people have shaken like the trees of the forest before the wind.⁹² There are numerous references to trees,⁹³ as well as grass and gardens, in the book, suggesting numerous links between different sections. Miscall reckons there are about ninety terms used concerning horticulture and arboriculture.⁹⁴ The shaking would seem to link with the previous chapter where the thresholds shook at the sound of the voices of the seraphs. Both symbolize fearfulness, although the causes were very different. Isaiah recognized his need, his uncleanness, and a solution was given: his lips were touched with the living coal from the altar. The king will shortly be offered a solution to his fear; if he will believe, he will be established. He need not be blown about by the wind of fear.

7:3

In v. 3 Isaiah is instructed by YHWH to go with his son, Shear-jashub

(שָׁרְיָשׁוּב) to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool. This is the only mention of Isaiah's son by name, and no indication is given as to whether he was called this from birth, or named in this way at a later stage.⁹⁵ His age is not given, although he was presumably old enough to walk outside with his father. We hear no more of Shear-jashub after this,⁹⁶ yet the fact that he is there would seem to be significant. He would appear to be an important factor in Isaiah's message to Ahaz.⁹⁷ As Thompson comments, "It is hard to

⁹² For the possible mythological background of the metaphor see Kirsten Nielsen, *There is Hope for a Tree: The Tree as Metaphor in Isaiah* (JSOTSup 65; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989). Sweeney (*Isaiah 1-39*, p. 160) suggests that the mention of the forest is reminiscent of the name of the royal palace, "... the House of the Forest of Lebanon".

⁹³ In v. 4, for example, the tree metaphor is again evident when Ahaz's enemies are described as "smouldering firebrands".

⁹⁴ Miscall, *Isaiah*, pp. 29-30.

⁹⁵ Michael E.W. Thompson (*Situation and Theology: Old Testament Interpretations of the Syro-Ephraimite War* [Sheffield: Almond Press, 1982], p. 24) believes that it was his birth name, as there is no record of a change of name. However, as this is an argument *e silentio*, there is no way of proving it.

⁹⁶ Isa. 10:20-23 may provide allusions to the name, Shear-jashub. The passage speaks positively of a remnant returning, but also emphasizes that it will only be a remnant (v. 22).

⁹⁷ Motyer, (*Prophecy*, p. 81) alludes to Shear-jashub as an "acted parable"; he is "a word become flesh". Ahaz is confronted not just with a word, a prophetic speech, but also by a living embodiment of that word. Ahaz must make a decision upon the word that stands before him, as he will also be required to do regarding the challenge of v. 9b.

understand why Isaiah should have believed himself to be so deliberately commanded to take his son with him unless the son were in some way involved in the meeting between prophet and king. Nowhere else in the prophetic records do we hear of a prophet taking with him a member of his family when he is to deliver an oracle..."⁹⁸ Again, Day notes that the name has symbolic significance, because of the statement in Isa. 8:18: "Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion."⁹⁹

The difficulty, which the reader faces, is knowing how it is significant, especially since the name may be interpreted in a variety of ways.¹⁰⁰ As Irvine notes, the order of the two words, which make up the name, is unusual, but this may suggest an emphasis on the subject שְׁאֵר (remnant).¹⁰¹ One of the main difficulties is the meaning of the verb שׁוּב. Does it mean "return" or "repent", an outward return as from battle or exile, or an inward return in the sense of spiritual conversion?¹⁰² Is the emphasis on the remnant intended to suggest that the remnant is something insignificant or is it intended to assert that "at least/indeed a remnant will..."?¹⁰³ Thus, as Irvine indicates there are at least four possible translations of שְׁאֵר יָשׁוּב.

Irvine tabulates these in the following way:

- (1) A remnant will indeed turn (to Yahweh).
- (2) A remnant will indeed return (i.e. survive).
- (3) Only a remnant will turn (to Yahweh).
- (4) Only a remnant will return (i.e. survive).¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Thompson, *Situation*, p. 23.

⁹⁹ John Day, "Shear-jashub (Isaiah VII 3) and 'the Remnant of Wrath' (Psalm LXXVI 11)", *VT* 31 (1981), pp. 76-78 (76).

¹⁰⁰ This is assuming that no emendation should be made to the name. For examples of some suggested emendations, see Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 142, n. 28.

¹⁰¹ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, pp. 143-144.

¹⁰² Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 296.

¹⁰³ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 144.

¹⁰⁴ M. Weiss ("The Contribution of Literary Theory to Biblical Research Illustrated by the Problem of She'ar Yashub", *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 31 [1986], pp. 373-386 [374]) had previously suggested similar categories.

However, this does not exhaust all the permutations of possible meaning, as scholars have interpreted the word “remnant” in various ways.¹⁰⁵ For example, the remnant is generally assumed to refer to Judah, but Clements is one of a few scholars who understands “the remnant” to refer to the enemy.¹⁰⁶ If this were the case, it would indicate a message of victory for Judah over the enemy, being assured that the Syro-Ephraimite siege would fail and that the enemy, that is, just a remnant of them, would return to their own land. However, the remnant, for Webb is a “holy seed” (6:13), a righteous remnant who will survive the coming judgement. According to Webb, Ahaz is being challenged to join this remnant.¹⁰⁷ Yet others refer to the royal house as the remnant in question. Irvine, for example, takes this position, as the account in Isa. 7:1-9 is, in his view, concerned with the survival of the Davidic regime, especially in view of the threat to replace Ahaz with Tabeal (v. 6).¹⁰⁸ The symbolic name of Isaiah’s son is then to be seen as an affirmation that Ahaz and the dynasty would survive the crisis, if they trusted in YHWH. At least a remnant, the house of David, would survive.

A number of scholars suggest that the meaning is deliberately ambiguous. Thompson, for example, argues that derivations of the word **שָׂרֵי** express both positive and negative aspects of the concept of remnant. Therefore, he believes the noun within the name to have both positive and negative aspects; a remnant does remain, but it is only a remnant.¹⁰⁹ However, Thompson may not be correct, as it does not follow that both meanings of a word are intended in a particular usage of that word. Kaiser believes that Isaiah was certain that God’s people were heading for a divine judgement, but that this would be

¹⁰⁵ It might also be noted that not all scholars pay great attention to the meaning of the name. Gitay, for example (*Audience*, p.131), notes that, according to 2 Kgs 16:3 and 2 Chron. 28:3, Ahaz has previously sacrificed his son. Gitay, therefore, sees the presence of Isaiah’s son as a protest against child sacrifice. However, since this case of infanticide is not mentioned in the book of Isaiah, it is doubtful whether such a conclusion can be drawn. In any case, the question of infanticide seems to be irrelevant to the present passage.

¹⁰⁶ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 83. Cf. also Day, “Shear-jashub”, p. 77.

¹⁰⁷ Webb, *Message*, p. 62.

¹⁰⁸ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, pp. 146-147.

¹⁰⁹ Thompson, *Situation*, p. 24.

followed by a new period of salvation.¹¹⁰ However, God's will was not to be seen as "...unalterable and blind destiny, exercised over men without regard for right and wrong. It depends upon the king's decision whether the child is to be a testimony of salvation or doom to him."¹¹¹

Scholars have adduced many different kinds of evidence in their attempts to explain the meaning and origin of the name שְׁאָר יָשׁוּב.¹¹² It is not possible to survey these in detail; in any case, given the literary approach of this study, it is more appropriate to concentrate on interpretations of the name that take account of the immediate context.¹¹³ However, it is soon apparent that, even when exegetes try to interpret the name within the context of Isa. 7:1-9, it is difficult to reach a secure conclusion as to its meaning. Thus, Irvine argues that in this pericope Isaiah is concerned to encourage Ahaz principally through the prediction of the failure of the Syro-Ephraimite siege. "In this instance, accordingly, She'ar-yashub probably expressed a hopeful message, promising the sure survival of a remnant. Isaiah perhaps intended a religious connotation as well: the remnant that turns to Yahweh will return (survive)."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Cf. Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 76; Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, pp. 296-297.

¹¹¹ Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 91.

¹¹² For example, Day ("Shear-jashub", p. 77) believes that the concept lying behind the reference to Shear-jashub is found in Psa. 76:11: "Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee; the residue of wrath thou wilt gird upon thee." Hasel (*Remnant*, p. 279) considers that "It is... natural to relate the term שְׁאָר יָשׁוּב to the remnant motif of Isaiah as it has come to expression prior to the events of 734-735."

¹¹³ So also Weiss, "Contribution", pp. 373-377 and Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 146. However, Irvine rightly criticizes Weiss for failing to heed his own advice. In his exegesis of Isa. 7, Weiss draws on other passages including 2 Kgs 16:7-8, where Ahaz is depicted as appealing to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria for help against Ephraim and Aram. Irvine (*Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 16) cites the comments of Peter R. Ackroyd ("The Biblical Interpretation of the Reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah", in *Studies in the Religious Traditions of the Old Testament* [London: SCM Press, 1987], pp. 181-192 [184]), who opines, "It is often stated, as if it were self-evident, that Isaiah warned Ahaz against appealing to Assyria for help, but this is not in the text. If it is proper to regard it as a logical position for the prophet to hold... we must still ask why the text does not make the point explicit." James A. Loader ("Was Isaiah a Quietist?" in Wouter C. van Wyk (ed.), *Studies in Isaiah* [Papers from the 22nd/23rd Congress of OTWSA, University of Witwatersrand, 1979/80; Hercules, South Africa: NHW Press, 1981], pp. 130-142 [131]) makes a similar point, arguing from a historical-critical position, that any negotiations with Assyria could at best have been only in their initial stages.

¹¹⁴ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 146.

On the other hand, Webb argues that in Isa. 7:1-9 Isaiah is challenging Ahaz to repent, and become a part of the righteous remnant.¹¹⁵ He argues that “Shear-jashub” may mean “a remnant shall return” or “a remnant shall repent”, but, “...since the immediate context is one of faith *versus* unbelief rather than exile and return,” the name would be better translated as “a remnant shall repent”.¹¹⁶

Weiss contends that 7:9b (אִם לֹא תִאֱמִינוּ כִּי לֹא תִשָּׁבֵר) indicates that Isaiah is starting “...from the premise that Ahaz would not have faith and that he would appeal to Tiglath-pileser.”¹¹⁷ The words of Isaiah are seen as constituting a threat, a threat that if Ahaz continues with his plan to ally himself to Assyria against Ephraim and Aram,¹¹⁸ then *only* a remnant will return from the war.

It has to be concluded that no certain conclusion may be drawn regarding the interpretation of the name Shear-jashub. The interpretation of this enigma depends very much on the interpretation of the passage as a whole, and thus, clearly, the name itself is of little avail in such a task. However, in the light of v. 9b which is examined below, Hasel, may be correct in seeing here “...an exhortation to king and people for an unconditional return to Yahweh in faith.”¹¹⁹

The meeting place is the same as that mentioned in Isa. 36:2/2 Kgs 18:17. Geographical locations in the Bible are often of theological significance.¹²⁰ The place where Ahaz failed is the position from which a new threat is made against Judah, when Hezekiah is king. Yet, Hezekiah is a king who humbly

¹¹⁵ Cf. Thompson (*Situation*, pp. 28-29), who similarly views the remnant as a group who will return to YHWH, and believes that Isaiah was inviting Ahaz to join that group.

¹¹⁶ Webb, *Message*, p. 62.

¹¹⁷ Weiss, “Contribution”, p. 385. See n. 113 above.

¹¹⁸ Weiss (“Contribution”, p. 386) actually states, “... if Ahaz carries out his plan to ally with Ephraim and Aram against Assyria...”, but he surely has this the wrong way round in view of his earlier argument.

¹¹⁹ Hasel, *Remnant*, p. 284.

¹²⁰ Comparison might be made, for example, with Mount Moriah in Gen. ch. 22, which is later said to be the site of Solomon's temple.

seeks God and thus succeeds where Ahaz failed. Wong states that the mention of this locality does not imply that YHWH was unhappy that Ahaz was there, assuming that he was checking a place that was probably strategically important.¹²¹ On the other hand, Kaiser argues that the fact that the king is checking his water supplies, if that is what he is doing, suggests that he is hoping to save himself by his own efforts.¹²² The narrative indicates that God knew where Isaiah would find Ahaz; whether this signifies anything about the character or attitude of Ahaz depends on the way the whole section is interpreted.

It may be coincidental that there are allusions to the four elements in vv. 2-4. Air is represented by the wind (רוּחַ), water is suggested by the upper pool and conduit, the fuller's field speaks of earth and the smoking firebrands signify fire, albeit virtually extinguished. There may be an underlying symbolism here; the close proximity of water and fire suggesting the extinguishing of the firebrands, Rezin and Pekah. The wind, which might have fanned the flames, is directed at the king and at the people, but it is an ill wind, for it signifies fear rather than a life-giving breath.

7:4

This verse is pivotal to an understanding of faith in the book of Isaiah, but it is a verse, which is something of a *crux interpretum*. It begins with a series of four imperatives; the meanings of the first two in particular have been hotly debated. The imperatives are in the singular, and, therefore, appear to be directed at Ahaz personally.¹²³ The number of imperatives clustered together at the beginning of the verse suggests that this is an important

¹²¹ Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 7.

¹²² Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 90.

¹²³ Y. Gitay, "Isaiah and the Syro-Ephraimite War" in Jacques Vermeulen (ed.), *The Book of Isaiah/Le Livre D'Isaïe* [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989], pp. 217-230 [222]) notes the difference between the singular verbs in v. 4 and the plural verbs in v. 9. Furthermore, he argues that v. 17 distinguishes three categories of people: Ahaz himself, the people, and the house of David. Thus, when the house of David is condemned in v. 13, Gitay argues that Ahaz is not being condemned, because his refusal to ask for a sign was not an indication of unbelief, as is commonly held, but rather an indication that his faith was sufficient without the extra proof that a sign would provide.

message for Ahaz.¹²⁴ This may indicate an emphatic message of assurance, as suggested by Clements,¹²⁵ or it may denote an urgent exhortation, depending on how the verse is interpreted.¹²⁶ The wording Isaiah uses is no doubt deliberately aimed at persuading Ahaz to follow his lead in believing in YHWH. For example, Pekah is mentioned periphrastically as the son of Remaliah. The omission of the name of the Israelite king is possibly “a sign of contempt”¹²⁷ and the description of Rezin and Pekah as smouldering firebrands, useless bits of burnt wood, appears to be satirical. Isaiah has no hesitation in using belittling language in order to encourage, or challenge, Ahaz to a commitment to faith.

Motyer takes the first two verbs together (הִשְׁמִיר וְהִשְׁקִיט), treating the second verb as an auxiliary to the first, suggesting that the force of the words is “Be careful to do nothing.”¹²⁸ The implication is that Isaiah was telling Ahaz that the threat from Aram and Ephraim was minimal, and that alliance with Assyria would be seen as a compromise when he should be trusting in YHWH to deal with the situation.¹²⁹ It may be possible to take the first two imperatives as a hendiadys, but this is usually seen as implying that the first is conditional, and that the second is declaring the consequence or fulfilment of the condition.¹³⁰ This might suggest a translation such as, “If you are careful/take heed, you will show quietness/cause quietness.” It is debatable whether Motyer’s translation is equivalent to such an interpretation.

¹²⁴ Cf. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, p. 216.

¹²⁵ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 84.

¹²⁶ The third of the commands, “Fear not” (אַל-תִּירָא) provides a linguistic link with Isa. 37:6-7 (2 Kgs 19:6-7) where the same command is used in an oracle to encourage Hezekiah. In the present context, however, it might equally be seen as an admonishment to Ahaz in view of his fear of what are, in reality, spent forces. Regarding the command אַל-תִּירָא see Edgar W. Conrad, *Fear Not Warrior: A Study of 'al tira' Pericopes in the Hebrew Scriptures* (BJS 75; Chico: Scholars Press, 1985).

¹²⁷ See, for example, Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 93; G.B. Gray, *The Book of Isaiah, I. Introduction and Commentary on I-XXVII* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), p. 118. David J.A. Clines (“X, X Ben Y, Ben Y: Personal Names in Hebrew Narrative Style”, *VT* 22 [1972], pp. 266-287 [284]), however, argues that “... it remains uncertain whether this name-form is contemptuous because the person is a *homo novus*, or because it is implied that the son is himself a nobody, so unmemorable and insignificant that he deserves to be mentioned only because he is the son of his father.”

¹²⁸ Motyer, *Prophecy*, p. 81.

¹²⁹ Motyer, *Prophecy*, pp. 81-82.

¹³⁰ See GKC §110f (pp. 324-325) and §86 (p. 105).

This verse appears to be the only one in the Old Testament where an imperative niph'al of the root שָׁמַר is followed immediately by another imperative prefixed with a vav, so there are no possible parallel examples of hendiadys with this verb to which comparison might be made.

Several other possible interpretations of the words at the beginning of this verse have been suggested. These include Irvine's suggestion of understanding הִשָּׁמַר as "remain aloof" (from the coalition),¹³¹ but this seems an unlikely translation. In any case, as Wong argues, Ahaz does not seem to have been given a choice about joining the coalition.¹³² Another possibility is posited by Würthwein, who believes that Isaiah is commanding Ahaz to refrain from asking Assyria for help. However, there is nothing regarding Assyria in the context.¹³³ Wildberger considers whether Isaiah may be intending to tell Ahaz not to forget the covenant YHWH made with David, since הִשָּׁמַר is usually found in exhortations where one is told to be careful lest one forgets YHWH (Deut. 4:9), or his covenant (Deut. 4:23), or the like. Yet, as Wildberger himself admits, there is no mention of forgetting in the present passage.¹³⁴ In the end, Wildberger seems to follow Würthwein in seeing Isaiah's main purpose as restraining Ahaz from appealing to Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, for help.

Huber translates the first imperative as "Be alert"; measures should be taken, but without being fearful.¹³⁵ His position is followed by Wong (in his PhD dissertation), who concludes that Isaiah wants to dispel fear, but not to forbid the taking of defensive measures.¹³⁶ However, if this is the case, one wonders

¹³¹ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 150.

¹³² Wong, "Isaiah VII", p. 540.

¹³³ E. Würthwein, "Jesaja 7, 1-9: Ein Beitrag zu dem Thema: Prophetie und Politik", in E. Würthwein, *Wort und Existenz* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1970), pp. 127-143 (133f.). See also Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 12, and Wong, "Isaiah VII", pp. 540-541 and the comments in n. 113 above.

¹³⁴ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 298.

¹³⁵ F. Huber, *Jahwe, Juda und die anderen Völker beim Propheten Jesaja* (BZAW, 137; Berlin; de Gruyter, 1976), p. 22.

¹³⁶ See Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 14. However, Wong's position may have changed. In his recent article (Isaiah vii 1-17, p. 542), he quotes Ward ("Faith", p. 331) apparently

why Ahaz should need to take such precautions in the light of Isaiah's declaration in verse seven: "It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass." Defence measures seem to be unnecessary according to Isaiah.

Gitay understands the first imperative **הִשָּׁמֶר** to refer to action happening to, or having an effect upon, the subject, as it is in the niph'al. However, the second imperative **הִשָּׁקֵט** is in the hiph'il, and he takes this to indicate action affecting others; Ahaz is to calm others down, rather than himself.¹³⁷ Gitay understands Isaiah to mean that Ahaz must be careful first about his domestic adversaries, and then must take control like a king and face the external political situation.¹³⁸ However, it is difficult to see how one can draw such inferences simply on the strength of the grammar that is used here.

However, Motyer's understanding, that Ahaz is being commanded to take no physical measures, finds considerable support among scholars. For example, von Rad sees Ex. 14:14 as a paradigm of a Holy War address, where the people of Israel are promised that YHWH will fight for them and they can remain passive.¹³⁹ Yet, the extent to which this text is comparable with Isa. 7:4 is debatable, as the terms **הִשָּׁמֶר** and **הִשָּׁקֵט** do not occur in Ex. 14:14.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the command **אַל-יִירָךְ**, which is the fourth of the imperatives used by YHWH, is also found in Deut. 20:3. This is the only other passage to contain this negative command, yet this is found in a

favourably: "Isaiah does not try to tell Ahaz what are the specific implications of this faith for political action – whether he should defend the city of Jerusalem, try to drive out the invaders, or merely wait quietly and let the danger pass. Thus we may not legitimately deduce a general theory of social ethics or political action from Isaiah's oracle." Wong comments, "It is true that Isa. vii provides no explicit description of the nature of faith. It concentrates instead on the consequences of unbelief."

¹³⁷ Gitay, "Syro-Ephraimite War", pp. 227-228.

¹³⁸ Gitay, "Syro-Ephraimite War", p. 228.

¹³⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 101-105. See also von Rad, *Theology*, II (London: SCM Press, 1965), pp. 158-160; H. Gressmann, *Der Messias* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1929), p. 237. C.A. Keller, "Das quietistische Element in der Botschaft des Jesaja", *TZ* 11 (1955), pp. 81-97 (83); Millard C. Lind, "Political Implications of Isaiah 6", in Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans (eds.), *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (VTSup, 70.1; Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 317-338 (325); Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, pp. 91-93. Conrad, *Fear Not Warrior*, pp. 52-56.

¹⁴⁰ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 148.

context where the people are being encouraged to fight.¹⁴¹ In any case, even if form critically a saying belongs to a Holy War address, it does not follow that it is being used in the same way in the present passage. The immediate context should be considered first rather than the original *Sitz-im-Leben*, which is, in any case, debated.¹⁴² However, Von Rad also appeals to Isa. 30:15-16: "For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, 'In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness (הַשְׁקֵט) and in trust (בְּטָחָה) shall be your strength.' And you would not, but you said, 'No! We will speed upon horses,' therefore you shall speed away; and, 'We will ride upon swift steeds,' therefore your pursuers shall be swift." The word "quietness" (הַשְׁקֵט) is paralleled by "trust" (בְּטָחָה). These qualities are perceived to be Judah's strength (Isa. 30:15), which is then contrasted with reliance on horses (30:16). In Isa. 30, trust in YHWH and "being quiet" are supposedly the alternatives to the militarism represented by trusting in horses. For Von Rad בְּטָחָה "...is just another word for what Isa. 7:9 called הָאֱמֻנָה."¹⁴³ Thus, Isaiah has updated the ancient regulations of the holy war, or rather, represented the understanding found in post-Solomonic literature according to von Rad. YHWH will act for himself, excluding any human military activity. It seems reasonable to see a parallel between this passage and Isa. 7:1-9. Yet, it does not follow that "returning and rest, quietness and trust" must be seen as tantamount to quietism. The reference to swift horses, for example, might refer to rushing into alliance with Egypt in view of the oracles at the beginning of the chapter. Trust in YHWH does not necessarily involve the abandonment of military means, but may be seen as acknowledging his sovereignty, being open to his "... mysterious but committed presence in times of crisis."¹⁴⁴

Perhaps, it is best to say that Isaiah does not necessarily seem to oppose

¹⁴¹ Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 11 n. 27.

¹⁴² As Wong notes (*Faith in Isaiah*, p. 11, n. 27).

¹⁴³ Von Rad, *Holy War*, p. 102. See Gordon C.I. Wong, "Faith and Works in Isaiah XXX 15", *VT* 47 (1997), pp. 236-246, where he argues that the verse does not necessarily imply an understanding of faith that rejects human resources *per se*. Von Rad (*Holy War*, pp. 104-105) also mentions Isa. 31:1. The same argument applies *mutatis mutandis* to this verse. See Gordon C.I. Wong, "Isaiah's Opposition to Egypt in Isaiah 1-3" *VT* 46 (1996), pp. 392-401.

¹⁴⁴ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 221.

defence measures *per se*, but, on the other hand, he does not advocate any concrete form of action except trusting in YHWH. Von Balthasar has drawn attention to the political reality of Isaiah's day when he affirms that "...it could be an aspect of the faith which God was entitled to demand of the people that they accept the fact that, under the temporary hegemony of a superpower, 'being still' was more correct than a will to be autonomous at any price, since Israel's vocation lay elsewhere."¹⁴⁵

7:5-9a

The plan of the invaders is now revealed to Ahaz, and to the reader. Syria with the help of the northern kingdom intended to conquer Judah and impose their own protégé in the place of Ahaz. The name of this usurper is also omitted in a contemptuous way (v. 6).¹⁴⁶ We are told nothing of his origin or position, only that he is the son of Tabe'al (or Tabe'el).¹⁴⁷ It is thought by some that he could have been an Aramean.¹⁴⁸ If this were the case, he would not be of Davidic descent, and Ahaz would need to fear not only his own demise, but also that of his dynasty.¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, however, the Hebrew word is not pointed as **טַבְּאֵל** which would suggest a meaning, "God is good", but as **טַבְּאֵל**, which literally means "Good-for-nothing"¹⁵⁰ or "Not good"¹⁵¹ (though some explain it as a pausal form, with the ordinary meaning). This suggests that it may not be a genuine name, but a deliberate misspelling to underline the contempt on Isaiah's (or the narrator's) part for the usurper. The divine verdict is then pronounced on the plans of Rezin and Pekah (v. 7). God is referred to as "Lord GOD" (**יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ**), his greatness being contrasted with the feebleness of these human kings.

¹⁴⁵ Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, p. 254, n. 10.

¹⁴⁶ The comments of Clines quoted in n. 142 may also apply to this man.

¹⁴⁷ It is Tabeel (Ταβηλ) in the Septuagint.

¹⁴⁸ For example, Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 93. Other explanations of the name are summarized by Irvine (*Isaiah, Ahaz*, pp. 153-154).

¹⁴⁹ See Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 84.

¹⁵⁰ BDB, p. 370.

¹⁵¹ Gitay, *Audience*, p. 137.

There are several interpretations of vv. 4-9. One of the main points of debate centres around the translation of the particle כִּי at the beginning of v. 8. At least three possible explanations have been propounded. First, it could have a causal sense, indicating the reason why the threat of the Syro-Ephraimitic alliance will be of no avail.¹⁵² This is probably the most common translation, as, for example, in the RSV of vv. 7-8: “thus says the Lord GOD: It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin...”

However, this does not seem to be a full explanation and several scholars have suggested that an ellipsis is indicated at the end of v. 9a. A parallel to the previous statements would appear to be “and the head of Jerusalem is Ahaz”. Yet, this would not seem to give much comfort when it is Ahaz and those around him who are said to be trembling with fear. Other suggestions include “but the head of Judah is Jerusalem and the head of Jerusalem is Yahweh”¹⁵³ or the same statement with “House of David” replacing YHWH.¹⁵⁴ However, there is no way of knowing if either of these is intended, since they are arguments *e silentio*. Wong supports the view of Kilian that the statements could be paraphrased as “the head of Aram is *only* Damascus.... *only* Rezin”.¹⁵⁵ The kings have already been belittled (v. 4a), so perhaps there is no need to include a word such as כִּי. Another argument in favour of the causal view is provided by Wildberger, who discusses the two verbs found in the divine pronouncement after the messenger formula in v. 7 (לֹא תִקּוּם וְלֹא תִהְיֶה). “In and of itself, קוּם can have a durative sense (‘have ability to go on’) or an inchoative sense (‘just now come into existence’), but the fact that one finds, parallel to תִּקּוּם (happen), the verb תִּהְיֶה (succeed, be) makes the inchoative meaning the more likely one.

¹⁵² See Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, pp.15-19.

¹⁵³ O. Procksch, *Jesaja I-XXXIX* (KAT; Leipzig: Deichert, 1930), p. 116.

¹⁵⁴ Würthwein, “Jesaja 7, 1-9”, p. 140. Irvine (*Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 156, n. 83) follows Würthwein on this point and lists several other scholars who also take this view.

¹⁵⁵ Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 18; R. Kilian, *Die Verheissung Immanuel. Jes. 7:14* (SBS, 35; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1968), pp. 24-28.

Therefore one cannot separate v.7 from the preceding causal clause...it is to be connected to v.8.”¹⁵⁶

The second view involves taking the causal clause of vv 5-6 with what precedes it, and seeing vv. 7-9 as an independent message even though dealing with the same situation as the previous verses. The word יְנִי is then translated as “namely”, “that”, or some such word.¹⁵⁷ The REB seems to follow this interpretation: “The Lord GOD has said: This shall not happen now or ever, that the rule in Aram should belong to Damascus, the rule in Damascus to Rezin...”

One of the main exponents of this view is Sæbø.¹⁵⁸ Among the arguments, which Sæbø propounds in support of his contention that vv. 7-9 form a separate entity from the preceding verses, are the following.¹⁵⁹ First, the messenger formula at the beginning of v. 7 indicates that a new unit is beginning with v. 7. However, as Wong shows, messenger formulas do not necessarily indicate a new unit; compare Jer. 9:12-14.¹⁶⁰ Secondly, vv. 7-9 are poetic, in contrast to vv. 3-6, but again this may not mean that a new unit is beginning. Thirdly, the MT also has a *setuma* at the end of v. 6. However, the later division of the text into such paragraphs is not a certain guide to the boundaries of units. Sæbø also argues that יְנִי at the beginning of v. 5 connects vv. 3-4 and vv. 5-6. He relies on Num. 11:19-20 as a parallel case, where, in a conversation between YHWH and Moses, יְנִי “expresses the following causal clause which is concluded by a quotation.”¹⁶¹ Wong follows Steck’s two arguments against Sæbø’s position.¹⁶² First, that in face of the

¹⁵⁶ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 300. See also p. 289.

¹⁵⁷ See Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, pp.19-25.

¹⁵⁸ Magne Sæbø, “Formgeschichtliche Erwägungen zu Jes.7:3-9”, *ST* 14 (1960), pp. 54-69 (reprinted as “Form-Historical Perspectives on Isaiah 7.3-9” in Magne Sæbø, *On the Way to Canon: Creative Tradition History in the Old Testament* [JSOTSup 191; Sheffield: SAP, 1998], pp. 93-107).

¹⁵⁹ Sæbø, “Form-Historical Perspectives”, pp. 96-97.

¹⁶⁰ Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 22.

¹⁶¹ Sæbø, “Form-Historical Perspectives”, p. 97

¹⁶² Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, pp. 23-24; O.H. Steck, “Rettung und Verstockung: Exegetische Bemerkungen zu Jesaja 7, 3-9” *EvT* 33 (1973), pp. 77-90.

rarity of the expression *כִּי יַעַן*, the four occurrences¹⁶³ (out of seven in the whole of the Old Testament) found in Isaiah should take precedence. In all the other references in Isaiah, the conjunction is used to start a sentence. Secondly, all the occurrences in the Old Testament (including Num. 11:20) have the function of explaining why an effect takes place. If Sæbø's position is followed, Isa. 7:5 would be the only place where *כִּי יַעַן* does not link two sentences or clauses where there is a clear indication of cause and effect.

The third view is propounded by Vriezen, who translates *כִּי* in a concessive sense as "even though".¹⁶⁴ As Wong notes, this would appear to contradict the spirit of v.4 where Aram and Ephraim are portrayed as ineffective.¹⁶⁵ Of the three possibilities, the causal view appears to be the most plausible. The references to the countries with their capitals and kings in vv. 8-9 are probably given to illustrate that those who are in charge are only human beings. These nations are only as strong as their rulers.¹⁶⁶ It has also been suggested that the use of the word "head" forms an interesting ironic foil to the word "tails" in v.4.¹⁶⁷ Thus, although they may look to be heads, they are no more than tails in the eyes of YHWH. The Lord GOD has spoken, and consequently the plan of the invading coalition will not stand.

There is much debate over the last line of v. 8. Many scholars see it as a later interpretation, an awkward interpolation.¹⁶⁸ Yet, Seitz reckons that the 65 years could be a part of the original context. "The prophet announces that Ephraim will fall within sixty-five years and then states that the head of Ephraim is Pekah, the son of Remaliah."¹⁶⁹ Motyer considers verses 8-9 to

¹⁶³ The other three in Isaiah are 3:16, 8:6, and 29:13.

¹⁶⁴ Vriezen, *Theology*, pp. 269-270.

¹⁶⁵ Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p.19 n. 52.

¹⁶⁶ Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 85.

¹⁶⁷ See E.M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1981), p. 116.

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 94; Clements, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 85; F. C. Fensham, "A Fresh Look at Isaiah 7:7-9", in Edgar W. Conrad (ed.), *Perspectives on Language and Text* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), pp. 11-17 (13).

¹⁶⁹ Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p.77. Lind ("Political Implications", p. 325) accepts that it is a gloss, but suggests that the glossator was correct in his interpretation that the two northern kingdoms would be crushed.

be a “perfectly balanced utterance”,¹⁷⁰ the prophesied dissolution of Ephraim (8c) corresponding to the potential dissolution of Judah (9c). However, the use of an exact number seems to be unusual in Old Testament prophecy.¹⁷¹ One would also expect v. 9a to follow directly after v. 8a; this line interrupts the flow of thought. On balance, it should probably be accepted that it is the work of a glossator, possibly from some time after the exile.¹⁷²

7:9b

The exegesis of 7:9b, which follows, is based on the MT, which differs somewhat from the LXX, OL, and Peshitta readings.¹⁷³ Yet, even keeping to the MT, there are a number of exegetical conundrums to consider concerning this verse.

The root **אָמַן**, which is of great importance for the study of faith as a theme, is found twice in this verse, firstly as a hiphil and then as a niphal.¹⁷⁴ Before

¹⁷⁰ Motyer, *Prophecy*, p. 82.

¹⁷¹ Robert Althann (“*Yôm*, Time and Some Texts in Isaiah”, *JNSL* 11 [1983], pp. 3-8 [6-8]), by redividing the consonants of the MT, changes the numbers, and produces a reading which he translates as “but within six cycles, even five years, Ephraim will be shattered, no longer a people.”

¹⁷² Fensham, “Fresh Look”, pp. 13-14. It is interesting that O’Connell (*Concentricity*, pp. 99-100), from a rhetorical-critical perspective, makes this sentence the axis of the section 7:7-9.

¹⁷³ The last word in v. 9 is read as *συνῆτε* in LXX, *intellegitis* in OL, and *testaklûn* in the Peshitta, which suggests that the final clause should read “you will surely not understand”. Glen W. Menzies (“To What does Faith Lead? The Two-Stranded Textual Tradition of Isaiah 7.9b”, *JSOT* 80 [1998], pp. 111-128) argues that the MT reading has priority, but that examination of 1QIs^a suggests how the reading found in the LXX may have arisen through scribal errors. See also Gordon C.I. Wong, “A Cuckoo in the Textual Nest at Isaiah 7:9b?”, *JTS* NS 47 (1996), pp. 123-124 for other possible explanations. On the use of the Latin version of v. 9b (*si non credideritis, non intellegitis*) in church history see Donald A. Cress, “Isaiah 7:9 and Propositional Accounts of the Nature of Religious Faith”, in E.A. Livingstone (ed.), *Studia Biblica: 1. Papers on Old Testament and Related Themes* (JSOTSup, 11; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), pp. 111-117.

¹⁷⁴ It seems clear that a play on words is involved in the employment of **אָמַן** and **אָמַן**. N.W. Porteous (“Second Thoughts II. The Present State of Old Testament Theology”, *ExpTim* 75 [1963/64], pp. 70-74 [71]) used this sentence as an example of a play on the root meaning which was common to the two forms. James Barr (“Did Isaiah Know about Hebrew ‘Root Meanings’?”, *ExpTim* 75 [1963/64], p. 242), however, maintains that an explanation based on root meanings is invalid, and that a more probable account is that “It worked through the collocation of the two usage senses, the sense of the hiph’il and the sense of the niphal.” The words were chosen because they make a point with striking brevity, which would not be the case if words from different roots were used; the root meaning is not intrinsic. (In both of these articles, the verse is incorrectly cited as 7:8.)

concentrating on the hiphil in the protasis, brief mention should be made of the apodosis. It begins with the word כִּי, which is probably asseverative, emphasizing and underlining the consequences of a failure to believe. The imperfect niphal of אָמַן is found in nine places in total in the Old Testament (including Isa. 7:9).¹⁷⁵ In five references, it is connected with דְּבַר (word).¹⁷⁶ In Gen. 42:20 Joseph's brothers have to prove that their word is reliable. The other four passages refer to the reliability of God's word. In 1 Chron. 17:24 it is used with אֱלֹהִים, and in 2 Chron. 20:20 it is used absolutely. The object of the threat in v. 9 is not clear, but it could include the future of the king, the continuance of the Davidic line or even the destiny of the nation itself. What is it, or who are they that will not be established? The use of the plural in v. 9b seems odd if this is still a personal conversation with Ahaz. The plural form may well be a confirmation that it is not just Ahaz's position that is at stake, but that of his dynasty as well.¹⁷⁷ Kaiser would go further and argue that "Because these (the 'house of David') act as representatives of the whole people, the latter are also included in what is said."¹⁷⁸ Kaiser views "faith" in the book of Isaiah as the means by which the people of God continue to exist and maintain their place in the elective purposes of God. "Without faith, Israel does not exist."¹⁷⁹

J.F.A. Sawyer ("Root Meanings in Hebrew", *JSS* 12 [1967], pp. 37-50 [45]), however, has examined several Hebrew words and their cognates in other Semitic languages and found that three roots (including the אָמַן root) show a similar etymological pattern "true/truth-established-pillar". He concludes: "If this pattern appeared in only one case, there would be little to go on; but when it appears three times, we are not justified in dismissing the idea that the etymological group of words has some common semantic element in it too; that the root 'm-n, in other words, is a sense-bearing element in the two words collocated by Isaiah in his famous pun, communicating in both ta'amīnū (believe) and tē'āmēnū established some idea of firmness after all."

¹⁷⁵ The other references are Gen. 42:20; 1 Kgs 8:26; 1 Chron. 17:23, 24; 2 Chron. 1:19, 6:17, 20:20; Isa. 60:4. The last reference seems to have the meaning "carried" and is classified under אָמַן II in *HALOT*.

¹⁷⁶ Gen. 42:20; 1 Kgs 8:26; 1 Chron. 17:23; 2 Chron. 1:19, 6:17,

¹⁷⁷ Some scholars see a connection between the niphal form of אָמַן and 2 Sam. 7:16 where אָמַן is used in the promise to David. Hagelia (*Coram Deo*, p. 31) asserts, "Isaiah is actually saying that 'unbelief nullifies the Davidic covenant.'"

¹⁷⁸ Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 94.

¹⁷⁹ Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 95.

In its hiphil form, אָמַן is found fifty-one times in the Old Testament.¹⁸⁰ The “agent”¹⁸¹ is nearly always human: 48 out of 51 references refer to a person who is responsible for the action.¹⁸² Some sixty percent of the references are found in the negative (i.e. 31 out of 51).¹⁸³ The “patient” is clearly God in eleven instances.¹⁸⁴

The understanding of what the word אָמַן means may be affected by the way the hiphil is considered to function. The first of two possible functions is the declarative-estimative, which would suggest a meaning such as “to declare/regard as faithful/firm” understanding an object, which in religious uses of the word would probably often refer to God. The second is the “internal-transitive”, which suggests that the verb refers to the sureness or certainty of the one who believes.¹⁸⁵ In v. 7:9b faith is referred to in an absolute way.¹⁸⁶ Wildberger defends the understanding of אָמַן as an inner-

¹⁸⁰ There are also three references in Aramaic in Dan. 2:45, 6:5, 6:24. Jepsen (“אָמַן”, p. 308) has asserted that, “...it can hardly be maintained that he’emin is a fundamental word in O.T. theology”. This is apparently because of the rarity of the term in the O.T. It is not clear what Jepsen means by “fundamental” here. Even though it must be conceded that the word is not frequently found, it is not without significance. It is fallacious to assume that the importance of a concept is necessarily in positive correlation to the frequency of the word that represents it. In any case, it might be argued that, although not frequent, the verb often occurs in places that might be considered significant. Hans-Christoph Schmitt (“Redaktion des Pentateuch im Geiste der Prophetie”, *VT* 32 [1982], pp. 170-189) argues that the major units of narrative such as the patriarchal narratives, the exodus narratives, the Sinai narratives, and the wilderness narratives show signs of homogeneous redaction. In particular, it is noticeable that faith terminology such as אָמַן is found throughout the Pentateuch and, according to Schmitt, at important compositional seams. Key texts include Gen. 15:6; Exod. 4:5; 14:31; Num. 14:11; 20:12. One may not necessarily agree with Schmitt that there is a deliberate theological redaction based on the theme of faith to see that some of the references may be considered to occur in theologically significant narratives.

¹⁸¹ The terms “agent” and “patient” are used, as they tend to be clearer than the terms “subject” and “object”, especially if passive forms are found. See Clark, *Hesed*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁸² God is the agent twice (Job 4:18, 15:15) and a horse once (Job 39:24).

¹⁸³ Jepsen (“אָמַן”, p. 303) notes that אָמַן always occurs as a negative in secular usage: “... there are too many men and relationships on which one cannot rely, and too many messages one cannot consider to be true.” There are places where a word such as “doubt” or “disbelieve” might have been used if the text had been written in English, but Hebrew appears to have no direct equivalent for such words. The nearest might be a metaphorical use of the verb פָּסַח (“to limp”) as in 1 Kgs 18:21.

¹⁸⁴ Gen. 15:6; Exod. 14:31; Numb. 14:11; 20:12; Deut. 1:32; 9:23; 2 Kgs 17:14; Isa. 43:10; Jon. 3:5; Ps. 78:22; 2 Chron. 20:20.

¹⁸⁵ Barr, *Semantics*, p. 185.

¹⁸⁶ It is used in this way seven times in the Old Testament; the other six references are Exod. 4:31; Isa. 28:16; Hab. 1:5; Ps. 116:10; Job 29:34, 39:24.

transitive hiphil¹⁸⁷ and discusses all the parallel references to Isa. 7:9b where the hiphil of **אָמַן** is used absolutely.¹⁸⁸ It does not seem necessary to discuss all of these references, as it is debatable whether they are all close parallels,¹⁸⁹ and the immediate context is arguably of greater importance in determining the more precise nuance of a word. Wildberger follows the notion of an inner-transitive hiphil quite rigidly. Regarding faith in Isa. 7:9b, he argues that faith here is not faith in God or in his prophetic word. Thus Wildberger argues that there is no object following **וְאָמַן** and, therefore, the meaning cannot be, “If you do not believe that what I have just spoken to you is a message from Yahweh...”¹⁹⁰ “Aber ‘Glaube’ bei Jesaja ist, um es zugespitzt zu sagen, nicht Glaube an Gott und auch nicht Glaube an das prophetische Wort, sondern eine aus dem Wissen um Gott und seine Verheissungen sich ergebende Haltung der Festigkeit, der Zuversicht und des Vertrauens

¹⁸⁷ Barr (*Semantics*, p. 177) also argues that **וְאָמַן** has an internal-transitive function and he refers to Gesenius-Kautzsch §53e, where the root **אָמַן** is cited as one of those “which express in the hiphil the entering into a certain condition and, further, the being in the same.” He (*Semantics*, p. 178) notes also that a declarative-estimative function would presuppose a transitive verb, but this is not the case with **וְאָמַן** except in Judges 11:20, a passage where the text may be corrupt. On the other hand, E. Pfeiffer (“Glaube im alten Testament: Eine grammatische lexikalische Nachprüfung gegenwärtigen Theorien”, *ZAW* 71 [1959] pp. 151-164 [153]) has tried to maintain that **וְאָמַן** is transitive; he states: “In der Konstruktion mit dem l^c oder b^c der Person oder Sache wird dieser Charakter deutlich.” This is an unusual understanding of the term “transitive”. The fact that the root **אָמַן** has no qal, except in the participle, might lead one to suspect that a declarative-estimative meaning is unlikely in the hiphil. Those verbs that are generally regarded as declarative in the hiphil (for example, **קָרַשׁ** and **רָשַׁע**) all have a qal. Since the publication of Barr’s work, the very existence of the declarative-estimative function has been put in doubt by E. Jenni. In his study, *Das Hebräische Piel* (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1991, p.12), Jenni states, “Aus den obigen Ausführungen über das deklarative Piel folgt, dass es ein deklaratives Hiphil in gleicher Bedeutung im Hebräischen nicht geben kann.” However, this would seem to be a step too far, for according to W.T. Claassen (“The Declarative-Estimative Hiphil”, *JNSL* 2 [1972], pp. 5-16 [7]), this position has to be maintained by Jenni, because of Jenni’s theory regarding the verbal stems in Hebrew, whereby each stem is reckoned to have its own unchangeable function.

¹⁸⁸ Hans Wildberger, “‘Glauben’, Erwägungen zu **וְאָמַן**” in Hartmann, Jenni, Kutscher et al. (eds.), *Hebräische Wortforschung: Festschrift zum 80 Geburtstag von Walter Baumgartner* (SVT 16; Leiden: Brill, 1968), pp. 372-386 (375-378).

¹⁸⁹ For example, Job 39:24 referring to a horse: “With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground; he cannot stand still (**וְאָמַן**) at the sound of the trumpet.”

¹⁹⁰ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 303. Contrast Kaiser (*Isaiah 1-12*, p. 95), who argues that the faith, which is required here, is a trusting in the promises of God, especially as revealed through the prophets. The call comes to Ahaz to abandon political plans and to commit his way to YHWH. Hans Walter Wolff, *Frieden ohne Ende: Eine Auslegung von Jesaja 7, 1-17 und 9, 1-6* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1962), pp. 23-25), similarly, understands the faith demanded to refer to the divine oracle just pronounced (vv. 7, 8a, 9a). Cf. Würthwein, “Jesaja 7, 1-9”, pp. 138-143.

Vertrauens angesichts der Bedrohlichkeit der konkreten Situation.”¹⁹¹ Wildberger is making a nice point, since, as he admits, confidence arises from knowing God and his promises. Wong asks how a command to be calm because of God’s promises differs from a command to believe in the word of God, which states that one should be calm because of God’s promise.¹⁹² Although it is true that the verb is used absolutely, it seems unlikely that Ahaz would not think that Isaiah was speaking of believing YHWH or the word brought to him by the prophet of YHWH. Isaiah is a Yahwistic prophet, so it is belief in YHWH or his word that he is expected to promote.¹⁹³

Von Rad sees the call to faith in the tradition of holy war. Ahaz must not usurp God’s position by taking action himself, but allow YHWH to act. The faith demanded was not based on something already existing, but in a future action of God.¹⁹⁴ Thompson sees the command to believe as a spiritual return to YHWH; faith has its object in YHWH. The only action specifically required of the king was to become a member of the faithful remnant.¹⁹⁵

Irvine rejects any notion of religious faith here. He argues, “The *hifil* of *’mn* can have a non-religious sense and, when used without an object, may simply mean, ‘to be firm, stand still, or hold steady’ (see Job 39:24). This is the import of Isaiah’s words in 7:9b. He is warning the Davidides to be firm, refraining from hasty decisions or policy changes (see 28:16).”¹⁹⁶ He sees this as applying especially to the Syrian-led coalition; the court should maintain its isolation. This position is debatable; as previously noted, there

¹⁹¹ Wildberger, “Erwägungen zu *האמין*”, pp. 377-378. See also Hans Wildberger, “‘Glauben’ im Alten Testament”, *ZTK* 65 (1965), pp. 129-159 (132).

¹⁹² Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 27.

¹⁹³ Wildberger would probably not refute this, but he sees the emphasis as being on the existential decision required of Ahaz at that moment. See Wildberger, “Glauben”, p. 132. Again, this existential aspect is found in Martin Buber’s work, which Wildberger quotes. Buber (*Faith*, p. 23) argues, “Indeed the addition of this (‘in God’) takes from the idea its essential character, or at least weakens it. The absolute construction conveys to us... the absoluteness of what is meant.”

¹⁹⁴ Von Rad, *Theology*, II, pp. 158-161. Cf. Von Rad, *Holy War*, pp. 104- 105, 129-131.

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, *Situation*, pp. 27-29.

¹⁹⁶ Irvine, *Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 158.

questionable whether Ahaz would understand v. 7b in this way. It also seems strange to use Job 39:24 as a parallel. A horse's inability to stand still when a trumpet is sounded appears to have nothing in common with Ahaz's dilemma. The statement may be useful as a metaphor of one's actions, but the immediate context in Isa. 7 is more relevant. Ahaz is being addressed by the prophet of YHWH. The oracle begins with "Thus says the LORD". If the message originated with YHWH, it seems reasonable that the command to believe has some connection with YHWH.

Of the two possible grammatical explanations, the internal-transitive hiphil seems more apposite, but it should be borne in mind that in many cases in the Old Testament the hiphil of אָמַן is followed by a preposition (בְּ or לְ). While the distinction between the two is not always apparent, אָמַן בְּ usually has the sense of responding with obedience to a person, often YHWH.¹⁹⁷ Perhaps rather than looking at other instances of the absolute use of the verb, the closest parallel to Isa. 7:9b should be considered. This is found in 2 Chron. 20:20 and uses אָמַן בְּ: "And they rose early in the morning and went out into the wilderness of Tekoa; and as they went out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, 'Hear me, Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in the LORD your God (וְהִתְאֲמִינוּ בַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם) and you will be established (וְהִתְאֲמִינוּ); believe his prophets (וְהִתְאֲמִינוּ בְּנְבִיאָיו), and you will succeed (וְהִתְאֲמִינוּ).'" There are two important differences between the two passages. First, 2 Chron. 20:20 is positive in form. Secondly, the two occurrences of the hiphil of אָמַן in 2 Chron. 20:20 are followed by בְּ and a noun. The meaning of "believe" is, therefore, clearer, for the command is to believe in YHWH and in his prophets. However, the word play on the hiphil and niphal forms of אָמַן is the same. It is also apparent that no military action is required on the part of Jehoshaphat or his men. However, this does not necessarily mean that this must be the interpretation laid upon Isa. 7. It is generally accepted that

¹⁹⁷ It is interesting that אָמַן בְּ is used in parallel with בָּטַח (to trust) in Job 39:11-12; Ps. 78:22; Mic. 7:5. Of the eleven references where God is clearly the "patient", nine include the use of בְּ and two לְ.

Chronicles was written after the Isaiah passage and that 2 Chron. 20:20 may have been based on Isa. 7:9.¹⁹⁸ Whether the Chronicles passage reflects the same understanding of the statement as Isa. 7:9, or is a development of it in a more quietist direction is debatable.¹⁹⁹

When viewed in the context of Isa. 7, the word **הִתְאַמֵּץ** suggests more than a secular nuance. Ahaz has heard YHWH's word. The call appears to be a call to believe in YHWH, or possibly, in the prophet of YHWH's words. Whether or not this is also a call to join a particular righteous remnant is not clear. Nor is it certain that Ahaz is being told to do nothing and wait for God to perform a miracle. Although it is difficult to come to a definite conclusion about the meaning of v. 9b, the explanation proffered by Buber may still be seen to be appropriate. He states: "We are not here presented with a mere play on words in the relating of two verbal-forms to each other; as nearly always in old Hebraic texts this is the way for something to be inferred by the hearer or reader. The two different meanings of the verb in the passage go back to one original: stand firm. The prophet is saying (to put into our language): only if you stand firm in the fundamental relationship of your life do you have essential stability. The true permanence of the foundations of a person's being derive from true permanence in the fundamental relationship of this person to the Power in which his being originates."²⁰⁰

7:10-17

Whether the discourse in vv. 10-17 is thought to have taken place immediately after v. 9 or later, it makes sense synchronically to take the whole passage, 7:1-17, together.²⁰¹ Verses 18-25 might also be taken with it, but they fit equally well with the oracles that follow in ch. 8. The challenge

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, Hagelia, *Coram Deo*, p. 32.

¹⁹⁹ Jepsen ("תַּאֲמִץ", pp. 306-307) sees Isaiah's admonition interpreted here "in a very unilateral manner".

²⁰⁰ Buber, *Faith*, p. 28.

²⁰¹ Cf. Irvine (*Isaiah, Ahaz*, p. 159), who argues that the intelligibility of vv. 10-17 relies on what was said about Rezin and Pekah in vv. 1-6 and on the oracle of vv. 7-9. Cf. Wong, "Isaiah VII", p. 542.

to believe, which seems to produce no positive response, is followed by the sign to confirm the word of YHWH.

It is noteworthy that it is stated in v. 10: “Again the LORD²⁰² spoke to Ahaz” (וַיִּסֶּף יְהוָה דְּבַר אֶל-אַחָז לֵאמֹר). The divine speech begins in v. 3, and there is no mention of any action or statement by Isaiah or Ahaz in the meantime.²⁰³ The main difference between the statements in v. 3 and v. 10 is that that YHWH is said to be speaking to Isaiah in v. 3, whereas in v. 10 it is indicated that he is speaking to Ahaz. As Wildberger notes,²⁰⁴ it would be unusual to show YHWH speaking directly to Ahaz, as if he were a prophet, but arguably, the narrator does this for a special reason. The use of the verb יָסַף suggests that YHWH has already been speaking to Ahaz. This is not surprising, as Isaiah has been instructed to deliver a message to Ahaz, and is clearly YHWH’s mouthpiece. However, it does indicate a very compact sort of style. No unnecessary details are allowed to interrupt the narrative. It is possible that something has happened after YHWH’s speech, which is not recorded, or that Ahaz has made some response that is not recorded.²⁰⁵ However, it could be that, although Isaiah may still be the mouthpiece for YHWH’s words, the narrator is drawing the reader’s attention to a significant point. That is that the command to “Ask a sign of the LORD your God” is given by YHWH and not just at the prompting of the prophet, Isaiah. The rejection of a sign from YHWH by Ahaz (v. 12) is then seen as directly disobeying YHWH’s command. The verb is used in v.13 without a named subject, but the use of “my God” suggests that Isaiah is speaking. This makes the introduction in v. 10 appear the more odd, but it further highlights the point that Ahaz has been directly commanded by YHWH.

The sign can be as deep as Sheol²⁰⁶ or as high as the heaven. Possibly this is

²⁰² BHS (ad loc.) proposes יְשַׁעְיָהוּ (Isaiah) in place of יְהוָה.

²⁰³ See p. 179 n. 62 above.

²⁰⁴ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 285.

²⁰⁵ Wildberger (*Isaiah 1-12*, p. 304) remarks that it might be expected that an account of Ahaz’s thoughts would follow vv. 4-9 (cf. Moses [Exod. 3:11] and Gideon [Judg. 6:15]).

²⁰⁶ Reading שְׁאֵלָה on the basis of LXX (εἰς βάθος) and Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion (εἰς ἀδην). So also BHS ad loc. and, e.g., Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 285.

a *merismus*, referring to two extremes to indicate that it could be anything. Ahaz is given *carte blanche* to ask for any kind of sign, whether natural or supernatural. According to Heschel, “(Ahaz’s) refusal to ask for a sign was motivated by piety (cf. Deut. 6:16).”²⁰⁷ Yet, asking for a sign is not unusual in the Old Testament. Compare Abraham’s request for confirmation of the divine promise (Gen. 15:8), and Gideon’s putting out the fleece (Judg. 6:36-40). More importantly for this study, compare Hezekiah’s asking for a sign, which seems to be requested almost as a matter of course (2 Kgs 20:8/Isa. 38:22).²⁰⁸ Ahaz may be correct as regards the letter of the law, but the fact is that his refusal to put YHWH to the test earns him the following rejoinder: “And he said, ‘Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?’” (7:13) Isaiah then insists on giving the king a sign (vv. 14ff.). Luther sums up the character of Ahaz thus: “Impious Ahaz simulates a holy attitude which says that he does not wish to request a sign because he fears God.”²⁰⁹ Isaiah sees through the façade of false piety to reveal a cowardly, vacillating character, who refuses to ask of God, possibly, because he wants to act on his own volition, without reference to God. Several commentators note the change from “your God” in v.11 to “my God” in v. 13 when Isaiah is speaking to Ahaz.²¹⁰ This suggests a change in relationship between YHWH, and Ahaz and the house of David. YHWH is no longer seen as the God of Ahaz.

In his recent article, Wong accepts that Ahaz is portrayed as a religious hypocrite, but he seeks to define further the kind of faith required of Ahaz by taking a backward glance at the previous chapters in Isaiah, looking for references to religious hypocrisy and faithfulness.²¹¹ He notes a linguistic connection between 1:14 and 7:13. The word used for wearing out God’s patience in the latter verse is also found in 1:14. “Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary

²⁰⁷ Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 64. Cf. the comments of Gitay (“Syro-Ephraimite War”, p. 222) noted above in n. 122.

²⁰⁸ See pp. 152-153 above.

²⁰⁹ Cited and translated in Wildberger (*Isaiah 1-12*, p. 305). “Impius Ahas simulat sanctimoniam, quod metu Dei nolit postulare signum.” WA 25, 116, lines 8-11.

²¹⁰ For example, Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 306.

²¹¹ Wong, “Isaiah VII”, p. 544.

(לֵאמֹר) of bearing them.” He also draws attention to a connection between 1:21, 26 and 7:9b. The phrase קִרְיָה נֶאֱמָנָה (faithful city) is found in 1:21, 26 and the root אֱמֵן is found twice in 7:9b. On this basis Wong argues that “There is good reason to allow Isa. i to influence one’s understanding of faith in Isa. vii.”²¹² The attack on hypocrisy in Isa. 1 results from a lack of righteousness and justice. He argues that ch. 1 can legitimately be seen as a source of influence on ch. 7. Faith in YHWH is, therefore, concerned with justice and righteousness. It may well be true that faith in YHWH has moral dimensions, but the links noted by Wong seem rather tenuous. The use of the participle נֶאֱמָנָה with a thing is rather different from the use of an imperfect niphal such as תִּאֱמָנִי in 7:9b. There is also no occurrence of the hiphil of אֱמֵן in ch. 1.

Ahaz refuses to ask for a sign, but he will be given one, even if he does not want one. The saying regarding Immanuel (7:14-17) is YHWH’s answer to Ahaz. There is much debate as to whether the sign proclaims disaster or salvation.²¹³ In the immediate context, one can only expect a threat to Ahaz and the Davidides. The house of David will not succeed without faith, which they do not seem to be exercising. The appearance of Shear-jashub is capable of various interpretations, but in the context, it might be seen as an exhortation to return to YHWH. Ahaz is criticized for wearying God as well as people. The introductory word לִכֵּן often introduces an oracle of disaster, though admittedly, not always.²¹⁴ The name Immanuel (God with us) may suggest assurance, but it could also be interpreted as a cry for help: “God, be with us”.²¹⁵ It is true that the curds and honey in v. 15 are often considered to speak of abundance or as symbols of paradise rather than deprivation, but

²¹² Wong, *Isaiah VII*, p. 544.

²¹³ See, for example, the discussion in Michael E.W. Thompson, “Isaiah’s Sign of Immanuel”, *ExpT* 95 (1983/4), pp. 67-71. Thompson contends that there are both threatening and hopeful aspects to the passage (p. 69).

²¹⁴ In Isaiah 1-39 the following verses introduced by לִכֵּן suggest judgement: 1:24; 5:13, 14, 24; 8:7; 10:16; 28:14, 16; 29:14; 30:7, 21, 13. Nevertheless, salvation is suggested in 10:24; 27:9; 29:22; 30:18; 37:33.

²¹⁵ Wong, *Faith in Isaiah*, p. 34.

they could be considered the poor fare of nomads.²¹⁶ However, if the name Immanuel and the eating of curds and honey are understood to betoken blessing, it may be that there was a time of false hope after the collapse of the Syro-Ephraimite coalition and a mother (or mothers) called her (their) children Immanuel, in celebration of the event. Nevertheless, disaster then struck which was of such a nature as to be likened to the division of the kingdom (v. 17).²¹⁷

Discussion of the meaning of the word *הָעֵלְמָה* is beyond the scope of the present study,²¹⁸ but one interpretation is that she was the wife of the king.²¹⁹ This in turn means that she may have been the mother of Hezekiah, who would then be identified with Immanuel. This view is often rejected on chronological grounds,²²⁰ but since there are so many questions regarding the chronology of events at this time in Judahite history, the possibility of this interpretation should remain on the table in view of its appropriateness to the wider context of Isaiah, where Hezekiah plays an important role.²²¹

The words of v.17 give the impression of a threat of judgement: "The LORD will bring upon you (*עָלֶיךָ*)²²² and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah -- the king of Assyria."²²³ Fohrer sees here an echo of Isa. 1: 19-20: "If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." He comments: "Man's willingness and God's readiness

²¹⁶ Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 314. Kaiser (*Isaiah 1-12*, p. 102) argues that understanding milk and honey as food of the gods or of paradise depends on parallels with other religions, rather than biblical references. It might also be noted that v. 15 is considered by many scholars to be secondary. See Wong (*Faith in Isaiah*, pp. 35-36) for a list of the main arguments.

²¹⁷ See John F.A. Sawyer, *Isaiah, I* (DSB; Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1984), p. 83.

²¹⁸ See, for example, Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, pp. 308-311; Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, pp. 100-103; Seitz, *Isaiah 1-39*, p. 79.

²¹⁹ This view is supported by Wildberger (*Isaiah 1-12*, pp. 310-311) among others.

²²⁰ See, for example, Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 102.

²²¹ See above on p. 234 n. 65.

²²² The use of this preposition suggests that YHWH was against Ahaz. See Wildberger, *Isaiah 1-12*, p. 316.

²²³ Wildberger (*Isaiah 1-12*, p. 287), among others, sees the phrase "the king of Assyria" as a gloss; its omission would make the threat less specific.

to forgive form a unity and belong together. They belong together in the same way as man's refusal and God's judgment which follows it. They are respectfully two parts of one single process: namely the salvation or the annihilation of the sinful existence of man."²²⁴ This section ends with a threat to Ahaz, the coming of the king of Assyria, which in turn becomes the opportunity for Hezekiah's faith to be revealed.

Conclusions

The two main human characters in Isa. 7 are Ahaz the king and Isaiah the prophet. The way in which these characters are portrayed may help in the interpretation of this passage. It is debateable whether they are to be seen as antagonistic towards one another, or on good terms. The message of Isaiah including the "incarnate" word, Shear-jashub, has been understood as a warning, or a promise, or both. It is difficult to be dogmatic in view of the variety of interpretations, but the impression, which the present writer has, is that Isaiah was primarily giving a warning to Ahaz, although there may be a glimmer of hope in the thought of a returning remnant. Looked at synchronically the early chapters of the book major on judgement, yet there are short pericopes that inspire hope. This passage seems to reflect those early chapters. It is interesting that Ahaz is never given his full title as king, but the phrase "house of David" is used in vv. 2 and 13. Seitz points out that if v.1 were omitted, we would not be certain from the passage that Ahaz was king, but perhaps just one of the members of the royal household. It may signify that just as other names have been deliberately omitted in what seems to be a rather dismissive way, a similar attitude is being taken against Ahaz. The way in which v. 1 shows the unsuccessful outcome of the Syro-Ephraimite alliance at the beginning of the story seems to be the narrator's way of indicating Ahaz's unnecessary fear, and therefore, lack of faith in YHWH. The impression that the narrator is projecting is that Ahaz is not the king he should be. Ahaz is not necessarily told not to make any military preparations, but he is told not to fear the heads of the neighbouring states, who are in reality smouldering "tails". From a political perspective he seems

²²⁴ Fohrer, "Basic Structures", p. 127.

weak and vacillating, but more importantly as a descendant of David and heir to the promise of an eternal throne and kingdom (2 Sam. 7:16), he needs Isaiah's exhortation, warning him of the consequences of not walking by faith. In Isa. 7:9b, Ahaz is reminded of his need to stand firm in his trust in YHWH, for true stability rests in his relationship with him. Ahaz should heed the word of YHWH mediated through Isaiah, but the impression given is one of reluctance or unwillingness to do so.

The similarities between the Ahaz narrative and the Hezekiah narratives within the book of Isaiah suggest that a comparison is being made between the two kings. The geographical setting of both narratives is the same, and the circumstances, which the kings face, have certain resemblances, but Hezekiah's role is far more prominent than that of Ahaz. Hezekiah, in contrast to Ahaz, is depicted as a king who willingly seeks Isaiah's help and intercession with YHWH (Isa. 37:1-4). Hezekiah claims to have walked in faithfulness (בְּאֵמֶת) before YHWH (38:3), but the negative form of the condition in 7:9b, and the rebuke from Isaiah (7:13) suggests that Ahaz is lacking in faith. If the identification of Hezekiah with Immanuel is also accepted, then the assurance of God's help is already projected into the Assyrian crisis.

Chapter Seven - Conclusions

This study has sought to investigate the Hezekiah narratives primarily in 2 Kgs 18-20, but also with reference to the parallel text in Isa. 36-39. The main method that has been used is narrative criticism. The intention has been to analyse the narratives from a literary perspective, studying setting, plot, point of view, and characterization to see how these might illuminate and explicate the theme of faith in these narratives. Attention has also been paid to certain key words that have been found in the narratives.

It was also felt important to look at the wider contexts of the narratives in the books of Kings and Isaiah. However, either of these endeavours could have resulted in a thesis in itself. The book of Kings was investigated to see why these narratives might have been included, especially in view of the fact that the root **בטח** is not found in the book outside of 2 Kgs 18-19. The situation as regards the root **בטח** is different in the book of Isaiah, but literary considerations invited comparison be made in particular with the Ahaz narrative in Isa. 7, where the **אמן** root is found.

Summary Overview of the Narratives

Setting

The long narrative summary of 2 Kgs 18:1-12 provides the setting for the following narratives. Here the central character, Hezekiah, is introduced. The typical regnal formula, which includes temporal information, is followed by a theological evaluation and vignettes that indicate the measure of this man. He is a man of devotion with reforming zeal. YHWH's estimation of him is high. Especially, he is a man who trusts in and holds fast to the Lord. Yet, he is also a man of action and battle. The short summary about the fall of Samaria (18:9-12) is also part of the setting. It is against this dark background of judgement upon the northern kingdom that Hezekiah must face the Assyrians and his own frailties.

The beginning of the siege narrative (18:13) introduces Sennacherib and

provides temporal information. The narrator informs us that all the fortified cities of Judah have been taken. The setting of the scene in this way initiates a sense of tension. What hope does Hezekiah have against such odds? The narratives found in 20:1-11 and 20:12-19 are introduced by temporal phrases that link them with the main narrative. The first verse of the introductory section and of each narrative include the name of at least one king and the name of another king or character. These usually indicate the main characters in the narrative.

Geographical settings may contain symbolism that evokes a theological message. The meeting by the conduit of the upper pool is significant at the beginning of the siege narrative. The conduit, which was probably used to bring water to the city, suggests the life and death struggle that was about to be faced by Hezekiah. It is especially important in the Isaiah account because the same setting is found in Isa. 7.¹

The other important geographical setting is that of the temple. When Hezekiah asks Isaiah to pray, Hezekiah is in the house of the LORD (2 Kgs 19:1-2). Later, when Hezekiah prays during the siege, he goes into the temple (19:14). On the third occasion when Hezekiah prays (20:2), however, he remains in his palace, although he is told through Isaiah that he will be able to go to the house of the LORD on the third day. The implication is that the temple is the place where prayer is wont to be made. Several Old Testament references (especially 1 Kgs 8) suggest that the sanctuary was considered, at least by some, to be pre-eminently a place of prayer. In view of this strong connection between prayer and the temple, it is surprising not to find him praying there. The narrative, therefore, emphasizes the seriousness of his illness that has prevented him from going to the temple by depicting Hezekiah as either physically incapable of going to the temple, or possibly as being made ritually unclean through the affliction.

¹ See comments below on the book of Isaiah.

Plot

In the siege narrative (2 Kgs 18:13-19:37), the theme of faith becomes evident through the plot. The tribute paid by Hezekiah to Sennacherib fails to dissuade him from besieging Jerusalem (2 Kgs 18:14-16). This had often worked for other kings before Hezekiah. Consequently, it seems that the end is near for the Judahite king and his city. This heightens the tension as the reader wonders how Hezekiah can possibly avoid surrender. There follow two speeches from the besieger. The aim of the Rabshakeh's propaganda appears to be to weaken the resolve of Hezekiah and his people by questioning the resources that are available to the Jerusalemites. Thus, the question of what or whom to trust is raised. In the first tirade from the Rabshakeh, doubt is cast on the value of trust in Egypt, in YHWH and in Hezekiah. Both human and divine resources are disparaged. Similarly, the Assyrian dismisses reliance in Hezekiah and YHWH in his second speech. The theologically ironic way in which the term **בטח** is used by the Rabshakeh in relation to the destruction of the shrines (2 Kgs 18:22) helps to focus the mind of the reader on the issue of faith. Hezekiah's policy was right in Yahwistic terms. The Assyrian has "scored an own goal"; he demonstrates his ignorance of YHWH's requirements, and highlights just how valuable is the trust that Hezekiah has placed in YHWH. Hezekiah's obedience to YHWH's commands provides him with confidence that he might expect to see YHWH work on his behalf.

After the first two messages, the Rabshakeh leaves the scene and it looks as if that may be the end of the matter. Yet, the tension heightens again, because Sennacherib sends a letter, which constitutes the third message. Hezekiah appears to find this just as threatening as the previous ones from the Rabshakeh when he was just outside the city. The theme of trust is maintained, but focuses now upon trust in YHWH (19:10). The gods of other nations have failed to deliver their devotees, the implication being that YHWH too will not be able to safeguard his people.

The place that prayer is given within the plot should also be mentioned. In 2 Kgs 19:4, Hezekiah sends his ministers to Isaiah to ask Isaiah to pray. The divine oracle received through Isaiah shows the effectiveness of that request and promises the ultimate demise of Sennacherib. Yet it is immediately after this that Hezekiah receives the threatening letter from the Assyrian. This in turn prompts the second prayer, which is made by Hezekiah himself in the temple. Again, this receives a response from YHWH. Prayer and faith are shown to be connected. Hezekiah's faith is expressed by his prayer, and it is because Hezekiah has prayed that a dramatic result is achieved.

In 2 Kgs 20:1-11 there is an emphasis on prayer again, which prompts an immediate response from YHWH (20:4). No overt mention of faith or trust is found, but the story clearly illustrates that YHWH responds to the prayer of his faithful servant. The giving of the oracle is followed by the application of the poultice of figs to the boil. The statement that he recovered seems to be an anticipatory summary. Hezekiah then requests a sign. This does not necessarily indicate doubt on his part; others such as Gideon had requested signs in the past. The sign seems to function as confirmation that YHWH's promise of the addition of fifteen years will be fulfilled. The sign suggests that the God who can reverse the march of time is more than able to lengthen the life of the king. The reversing of the shadow indicates that Hezekiah's end will be delayed. The sign may be seen as confirmation of the trust that Hezekiah had placed in YHWH.

This narrative appears to have connections with the previous one. The destiny of king and city seem to be entwined together. The powerless king is threatened this time by disease, but he prays and receives again an oracle from YHWH, which promises not only an extension of his life, but the deliverance of Jerusalem. The very body of the king may symbolize the city, the infection that afflicted the skin of Hezekiah reflecting the siege on the edge of Jerusalem. Both the life of Hezekiah and the life of the city are preserved for a time. Through Hezekiah's actions and words, which spring from his faith, his physical body and the body politic are delivered.

Turning to the final narrative in 20:12-19, it might seem that here the theme of trust is undermined. Hezekiah welcomes and shows his treasures to a delegation from Babylon. Yet, it need not be assumed that there is anything wrong in this. There is no complicated plot here, the section consisting mainly of a dialogue between Hezekiah and Isaiah. The absence of prayer appears to be significant. The oracle from YHWH does not come in response to prayer. Rather it seems that Hezekiah has acted out a kind of parable, the meaning of which is explained in the oracle. The purpose of this narrative would appear to centre more on the coming of the Babylonians than on Hezekiah.

Point of View

Point of view is important, as it helps the reader to understand whose perception of a character is being appreciated and how the depiction of the character is being made. Sometimes different points of view are in agreement with one another. Thus, in 2 Kgs 18:3 the perspective belongs to God, although it is the narrator who is making the point that Hezekiah acted rightly in the eyes of YHWH. It indicates God's attitude to Hezekiah, which is also apparently the attitude of the narrator. The use of the phrase "in the eyes of the Lord" (בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה) makes the point more emphatically. According to 2 Kgs 20:3, Hezekiah shares this assessment of himself, when he claims to have done what is good in the sight of YHWH.

Points of view can be in sharp distinction from one another. The view of the Rabshakeh is usually the opposite of the narrator's. The Rabshakeh wrongly evaluates Hezekiah as a destroyer of YHWH's shrines (18:22), and as a kind of false prophet (18:30, 32). Furthermore, his evaluation of YHWH is at fault. He sees YHWH as no more powerful than any other god of the countries that have been devastated by the Assyrians (18:35). YHWH is considered to be capable of deceit by the Rabshakeh and not to be trusted (19:10). The point of view espoused by the Rabshakeh is clearly meant to be read as erroneous.

Some scholars seek to make more subtle distinctions between points of view. Although Nelson agrees that events prove the Rabshakeh wrong, he maintains that Yahweh himself undercuts the point of view of the narrator and Hezekiah. Since YHWH states that he will save Jerusalem for his own sake and that of David's (2 Kgs 20:5-6), Hezekiah's faithfulness (20:3) seems to be immaterial in Nelson's view. This may be a step too far. YHWH has identified himself as "the God of David your father" (20:5). It has also been shown how much Hezekiah is likened to David. Hezekiah's faithfulness to YHWH makes him as one with David. YHWH's response to the prayer of Hezekiah and his statement regarding the deliverance of Jerusalem for his own and David's sake do not necessarily conflict with each other.

Characterization

1. Isaiah

How a character is depicted may often depend on their interaction with other characters. Hezekiah is shown to be close to Isaiah, and willing to ask for his help. However, in these narratives, Isaiah's role is largely that of an intermediary between Hezekiah and YHWH. There is at least one occasion when Isaiah is seen to take the initiative, when he commands the application of the fig poultice (20:7). Although the king is said to have recovered in v. 7, the way that this verse has been placed in the narrative (well before the end) intimates that this is not the climactic action of this narrative and that even Hezekiah's recovery is subordinated to the activity of YHWH. It is YHWH who confirms the promise of recovery by moving the shadow back in response to the cry of Isaiah. In the Hezekiah narratives, it seems that Hezekiah is a more prominent character than Isaiah.

2. YHWH

In literary terms, YHWH too may be studied as a character. YHWH is depicted as being in control of the situation in 18:13-19:37. He sends a message of reassurance through Isaiah, because he will put a spirit in the king of Assyria that will cause him to react to a rumour and return to his own land and fall by the sword (19:6-7). In the later oracle (19:21-34) YHWH again

asserts his authority over Sennacherib. Sennacherib seeks to elevate himself to a divinity by boasts that lay claim to a domination of nature. YHWH, on the other hand, makes a more realistic statement when he describes the devastation by Sennacherib of fortified cities and the dismay and confusion of their inhabitants. All that Sennacherib has done is only what YHWH has allowed in his plans. YHWH's final comment concerns the immediate situation of the siege. The Assyrian king will not enter Jerusalem, but will return by the way that he has come.

YHWH is also shown to be sovereign over all the action of the scene in 20:1-11. He communicates to Hezekiah through Isaiah that Hezekiah faces death and must set his house in order (v.1). He changes his mind, not capriciously, but in gracious response to the petition of Hezekiah. YHWH commands Isaiah to turn back and announce his acknowledgement of the king's prayer, which is done with a series of verbs in the first person (vv.5-6). What YHWH does will be for his own sake, and will also fulfil his covenantal obligations to David. It is not in contradistinction to what Hezekiah desires, but YHWH makes the point that he acts on his own terms. The sign, which YHWH offers Hezekiah through the prophet, is one that could only be performed by YHWH (vv. 9-11).

The narrator seems to suggest that YHWH's ultimate aim in 20:1-11 is to spare Hezekiah, possibly to increase his faith in view of the siege of the Assyrians, or so that the people of Jerusalem may see what YHWH has done for their leader and learn to trust in YHWH. The present narrative may well have been included alongside the narrative regarding the siege and deliverance of Jerusalem (18:17-19:37) to emphasize YHWH's power and the importance of the role of faith in the life of God's people.

The oracle from YHWH in 20:16-18 again emphasizes his control of history. The same God who has promised deliverance now speaks of exile. This is not necessarily a refection upon Hezekiah. It might be seen as a gracious

forewarning.

3. Sennacherib

Brief mention might also be made of the characterization of Sennacherib.² Sometimes the disposition of the hero can be emphasized by being contrasted with the villain. This has been shown to be the case with Sennacherib. Sennacherib is depicted as a man who undermines trust in all resources, both earthly and divine. He is portrayed as a man full of *hubris*; rather like the “fool” of Psalm 74:22, he scoffs (root חרף) all day long. He might also be compared to Goliath, the other prime example of a scoffer in the Old Testament. Thus, Sennacherib is the personification of the opposite of trust in YHWH.

4. Hezekiah

However, it is the character of Hezekiah that is clearly central to the narratives, and consequently, our main interest. In the introductory section (18:1-12), the characterization of Hezekiah was found to be very positive. The characterization was demonstrated not just by one statement or one method, but by a combination of several techniques. These included the theological evaluation in v. 3, an intensive list of verbs in v. 4 indicating the king's actions, and the statement of his trust in YHWH, which was unequalled by other kings. (The verb בָּטַח, which appears to be the *leitmotif* of the main narrative, was then introduced.) This was followed by further statements about his devotion to YHWH (v. 6) and his obedience to YHWH's commands. The narrator's comment of v. 7 confirmed that YHWH was with him and that he was accorded success, particularly as regards two foreign nations, the Assyrians and the Philistines. Furthermore, the notice of vv. 9-12 provided a contrast between Hezekiah and the people of the northern kingdom, portraying Hezekiah in a favourable light.

In the section 18:13-19:37, Hezekiah is especially characterized as a man of

² The Rabshakeh is a distinct character, but as he is portrayed in the main as the messenger of Sennacherib, he is not treated separately here.

faith. His trust in YHWH is implied by the repeated and ironical use of **בַּטָּח** by the Rabshakeh. The actions of Hezekiah, especially his praying to God in the temple confirm this. Hezekiah's faith is expressed by his prayer, and it is ostensibly because Hezekiah has prayed (19:20) that a dramatic result is achieved. It is a faith born out of powerlessness, an illustration of the effectiveness of total dependency upon God. In contrast to YHWH, the gods of the nations are described derisively. It is noteworthy that the prayer ends with the desire that all the kingdoms of the earth may *know* that Hezekiah's God alone is the Lord (v.20). To know (**יָדַע**) is another Old Testament term that indicates relationship with God.

Within the narrative, it might be asserted that Hezekiah appears to show signs of a growing confidence, evidenced by his direct prayer to God without any mention of seeking out the prophet (19:14-19). Again, the words of the prayer indicate a strong belief in and reliance upon YHWH. A definite devotion to God seems to be evident on Hezekiah's part within chs. 18-19.

In 20:1-11 Hezekiah is depicted as a man who is close to God. His prayer is deemed to be effective without prophetic intercession. Although he is ill, there is no clear statement that it is because of personal sin. Hezekiah does not assume that illness must be accepted as God's will, but pleads with YHWH, asking him to remember his upright deeds and attitude (vv.2-3). The use of the verb **זָכַר** by Hezekiah suggests that he hopes that God will act on his behalf. YHWH, who confirms that he not only hears Hezekiah's prayer but also sees his tears, acknowledges his praying and weeping.

Hezekiah is portrayed as believing in God as one who demonstrates his love to his people, yet who may be persuaded to change his immediate intentions. He is also depicted as a man who is active and who must make choices. He requests a sign, not necessarily because he is demanding proof, but because he believes God. He chooses the more difficult of two possible signs. Again, this does not have to be seen as a lack of faith on the king's part, but can be

considered as Hezekiah's belief that YHWH is able to act in a miraculous way.

Something of Hezekiah's inner character is revealed through his words. His devotion to YHWH is evidenced by his whole-heartedness and his walking before YHWH in faithfulness (אֱמֻנָה). The language used in his prayer suggests that he sees himself as a vassal in covenant relationship with his suzerain, expecting a reward on the grounds of his good deeds and faithfulness. His deeds are not outward acts contradicted by a selfish inner nature, but demonstrate wholeness of character.

The disposition of Hezekiah is also indicated by the way YHWH responds to him. YHWH answers the king's prayer positively and seems to accept that Hezekiah is a righteous man. He grants him an extension of life, not only because of his uprightness, but because it suits his will. The language that YHWH uses indicates that Hezekiah is clearly regarded as a king in the Davidic mould. Hezekiah is regaled as "the prince of my people" (20:5), YHWH is identified as "the God of David your ancestor" (20:5), and YHWH will act "for my servant David's sake" (20:6).

In 20:12-19 comparisons with previous embassies to kings in Jerusalem reveal no basis for Hezekiah to suspect foreign visitors. Despite interpretations to the contrary, there is no indication in the text that Hezekiah has done anything morally wrong or even, politically foolish in showing the Babylonians his treasures. According to Deuteronomic law, Hezekiah was acting properly in his dealings with visitors from a distant land.

Hezekiah accepts the oracle of judgement pronounced by the prophet without complaint. He offers no prayer, suggesting that this would be ineffective in these circumstances. Hezekiah's response (20:19) does not have to be understood as an expression of smugness or cynicism. If the present narrative is read alongside the siege narrative, interesting contrasts may be noted between the speeches of the Assyrians and Hezekiah, and their evaluations of

the words of YHWH. While the evaluation by the Assyrians is tendentious, Hezekiah's evaluation of the word of YHWH as good seems valid and probably sincere. Hezekiah's second statement in 20:19 may equally signify genuine relief at the delay of judgement, which he may have understood as reward for his trust in YHWH.

The Book of Kings

The Hezekiah narratives are found in a significant position in the book of Kings. They follow the fall of the northern kingdom, which was judged for serving idols and erecting high places, pillars, and Asherim, but precede the reign of Manasseh, the Judahite king whose deeds precipitate the judgement on the southern kingdom. This threat of judgement is repeated in the time of Josiah, but, like Hezekiah, he is promised to be spared the sight of this evil (22:15-20).

Scholars who have attempted to find authorial intention in the book of Kings have tended to concentrate upon the kings and the possibility, or otherwise, of the continuation of the Davidic line. Some literary studies that have sought to compare the book with genres such as tragedy have also tended to focus upon the human outcome. However, the suggestion has been made in this study to see the background of Kings as a battle between YHWH and lesser deities. This puts the human lives into a different perspective. What matters most in such a view is the sovereignty of YHWH and the need for the human characters to be in proper relationship with him, as might be expressed by Torah obedience (cf. Josiah, 2 Kgs. 23:25). Of course, many of the kings are portrayed as failing in respect of their relationship with YHWH. Even those who are represented as doing right in his eyes have virtues that are variable. Only Hezekiah is depicted as excelling in his trust in YHWH. Thus, the glaring lack of the root **בטח** in the rest of Kings might be explained. Hezekiah's efforts were not able to turn away fully the impending judgement upon Judah, but Hezekiah and his comrades are depicted as seeing victory over Sennacherib and the Assyrians, and are spared the ignominy and distress of exile. More importantly, YHWH is seen as victorious over Sennacherib,

and his god, Nisroch.

It is in 2 Kgs. 19:14-28 that the contest between YHWH and Sennacherib comes to the fore. Hezekiah prays directly to YHWH himself, and YHWH is described as the creator of heaven and earth. YHWH is thus seen as not just another god who may be tossed into the fire, but also the God who is sovereign over all nations, including Assyria. The words of Sennacherib are viewed as blasphemous, as he claims actions of which YHWH alone is capable (see 19:23-24 especially). Thus, he sets himself up as a rival to YHWH, and pays the consequences. The trust in YHWH and his servant, Hezekiah, which Sennacherib has sought to undermine, is shown to be well founded. These chapters fit in well with the theme of a contest between YHWH and other gods. This theme, whether or not the intention of the author/redactor, may be seen as providing a meaningful placement for the Hezekiah narratives within the book of Kings.

The Book of Isaiah

Within the context of the book of Isaiah, the similarities between the Ahaz narrative and the Hezekiah narratives suggest that a comparison is being made between the two kings. The geographical setting of both narratives is the same. The circumstances that the kings faced also have certain resemblances, but Hezekiah's role is more prominent. Hezekiah, in contrast to Ahaz, is depicted as a king who willingly seeks Isaiah's help and intercession with YHWH (Isa. 37:1-4). Hezekiah claims to have walked in faithfulness (בְּאֵמֶת) before YHWH (38:3), but the negative form of the condition in 7:9b and the rebuke from Isaiah (7:13) suggest that Ahaz is lacking in faith.

Concluding Remarks: The Nature of Faith

Some final comments about the nature of the faith exemplified in these narratives may be appropriate. A comment by Clements is noteworthy. He states, "Several commentators have branded the particular act of religious

faith demanded by Isaiah as a kind of irrational 'Utopianism'.³ This charge, however, could be brought against many passages of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. An example from the New Testament, which might be similarly characterized, is the dominical saying of Mark 11:22-23: "Jesus answered them, 'Have faith in God. Truly I tell you, if you say to this mountain, "Be taken up and thrown into the sea," and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you.'" This could be considered "... grossly unrealistic and destined to cruelly disappoint those who accept it."⁴

Clements continues his discussion by considering the fact that just over a century later Jerusalem was threatened by the Babylonians twice. On these occasions, there was no angelic deliverance. The problem was that many had a reckless faith, a false presumption that God would preserve Jerusalem. Clements seems to charge Isaiah with being a dangerous prophet, even assuming that Hezekiah and Jerusalem were delivered as recorded in 2 Kgs 19/Isa. 37. He still sees a problem even if the prophet's assurance is seen to be dependent upon a true repentance and dedication to God. "It merely leaves us with the notion of a kind of ideal faith which can subdue kingdoms and defeat armies, but which is of so rare a kind as to be impossible for ordinary people."⁵ Marshall's retort to the charge regarding the Markan saying is put in more positive terms, yet the rarity of the working of such faith is tacitly implied. He observes that Mark would understand the certainty of faith as stemming from "... a clear awareness of having been commissioned to exercise delegated authority... and an implicit perception of God's will in a specific situation."⁶

Clements also mentions the type of faith called for in the book of Lamentations, where the people are expected to believe that the destruction of Jerusalem was divinely ordained as a punishment for the sin of the people.

³ Clements, *Deliverance of Jerusalem*, p. 25.

⁴ Marshall, *Faith*, p. 168.

⁵ Clements, *Deliverance*, p.26

⁶ Marshall, *Faith*, p.168.

Clearly different types of faith are found within the Bible. Clements writes of "... the faith that finds its object in security and deliverance and the faith that recognises, and can embrace, tragedy and judgement."⁷ Similarly, Brueggemann states, there is within the Old Testament both a "structure legitimation" of the common theology of the day and an "embrace of pain" where there is a struggling to be free from the common theology.⁸ These different aspects of faith may be reflected in the contrasting accounts of the events of 701 BC and those of a century later. There is a tension within the Old Testament to reconcile the mighty acts of YHWH with the everyday struggle with suffering and injustice. There is no easy answer to that tension; indeed it is still felt today by many people of believing communities, both Jewish and Christian. A faith that only embraced pain would suggest a joyless drudgery, but a faith that always brought immediate deliverance would require nothing that could be recognized as faith.

⁷ Clements, *Deliverance*, p. 27

⁸ Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, 1: Structure Legitimation", *CBQ* 47 (1985), pp. 28-46 (31).

Abbreviations

- AB—Anchor Bible
 ABD—D. N. Freedman (ed.), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (6 vols.; New York: Doubleday, 1992)
 AOAT—Alter Orient und Altes Testament
 ATANT—Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
 ATD—Das Alte Testament Deutsch
 AUMSR—Andrews University Monographs Studies in Religion
 BASOR—*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
 BDB—F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907)
 BETL—Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
 BHS—*Biblia hebraica stuttgartensia*
 Bib—*Biblica*
 BJRL—*Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*
 BJS—Brown Judaic Studies
 BKAT—Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
 BLS—Bible and Literature Series
 BN—*Biblische Notizen*
 BTB—*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
 BZ—*Biblische Zeitschrift*
 BZAW—Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
 BZWANT—Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
 ConBOT—Coniectanea biblica, Old Testament Series
 CBQ—*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
 CBQMS—Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
 CR:BS—Currents in Research: Biblical Studies
 DSB—Daily Study Bible
 EBib—Etudes bibliques
 EBT—*Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*
 EvT—*Evangelische Theologie*
 ExpTim—*Expository Times*
 FOTL—Forms of Old Testament Literature
 FRLANT—Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
 GHAT—Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
 GKC—*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (ed. E. Kautzsch, revised and trans. A. E. Cowley; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910)
 HALOT—*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (5 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1994-2000)
 HBT—*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
 HCOT—Historical Commentary on the Old Testament
 HSM—Harvard Semitic Monographs
 HTR—*Harvard Theological Review*
 HUCA—*Hebrew Union College Annual*
 ICC—International Critical Commentary
 IDB—G. A. Buttrick (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962)

- IDBSup*— K. Crim (ed.), *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*,
 Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976)
ILBS—Indiana Literary Biblical Series
Int— *Interpretation*
IOSOT—The International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament
JBL— *Journal of Biblical Literature*
JNES— *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL— *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JSNT— *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT— *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup—Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSS— *Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS— *Journal of Theological Studies*
KAT—Kommentar zum Alten Testament
MBPS—Mellen Biblical Press Series
NAB—New American Bible
NCBC—New Century Bible Commentary
NEB—New English Bible
NIBC—New International Bible Commentary
NICOT—New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT— C. Brown (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New
 Testament Theology* (4 vols.; Exeter: Paternoster Press, rev edn, 1986)
NIDOTTE—W.A. VanGemeren (ed.), *The New International Dictionary of
 Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (5 vols.; Grand rapids: Zondervan,
 1997)
NJPSV—New Jewish Publication Society Version
NRSV—New Revised Standard Version
OBT—Overtures to Biblical Theology
OTE— *Old Testament Essays*
OTG—Old Testament Guides
OTL—Old Testament Library
OTS— Oudtestamentische Studiën
OTWSA—Die Ou Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid Afrika.
PEQ— *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
RAC— *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*
RB— *Revue biblique*
RelSRev— *Religious Studies Review*
RGG— *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (4th ed., 1998)
RSV—Revised Standard Version
SBLDS—Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBS—Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
SBT—Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS—Sources for Biblical and theological Study
SHBC—Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary
SHCANE—Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East
SJOT— *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*
SJT— *Scottish Journal of Theology*
SOTBT—Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology
ST— *Studia theologica*

TDNT— G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (trans. G. W. Bromiley; 10 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-1976)

TDOT— G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (trans. J. T. Willis; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-)

TLOT— E. Jenni and C. Westermann (eds.), *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (trans. M.E. Biddle; 3 vols.; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997).

TLZ— *Theologische Literaturzeitung*

TRE— *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*

TWAT— G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren, and H.-J. Fabry (eds.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (8 vols.; Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1970-1995)

TynBul— *Tyndale Bulletin*

TZ— *Theologische Zeitschrift*

VT— *Vetus Testamentum*

VTSup— *Vetus Testamentum*, Supplements

WBC— *Word Biblical Commentary*

WComp— *Westminster Bible Companion*

WMANT— *Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament*

ZAW— *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

ZNW— *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

ZTK— *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

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